

Archaeology and the Bible

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Introduction

Archaeology is important for biblical studies in a number of indirect ways. It not only shines light on the geographical, cultural, political, and religious backgrounds of biblical texts but also helps our understanding of biblical languages and provides insight for textual criticism. Texts discovered at Tell el-Amarna (Amarna letters), Tell-Mardikh (Ebla tablets), Tell-Hariri (Mari tablets), Yorghun Tepe (Nuzi tablets), Ras Shamra (Ugarit archives), Boghazkoy (Boghazkoy tablets), Qumran (Dead Sea Scrolls), Jerusalem (silver amulet scrolls), and En Gedi (burnt Leviticus scroll) are examples of archaeological finds that are tremendously important for these reasons.

Archaeological sites are often what are called "tells," which is a hill or mound that has been built up over many years through successive occupations of the site. It states in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*:

tell, ("hill" or "small elevation"), in Middle Eastern archaeology, a raised mound marking the site of an ancient city.

The shape of a tell is generally that of a low truncated cone. In ancient times, houses were constructed of piled-up mud (*pisé*), lumps of clay pressed together (adobe), or (later) sun-dried or kiln-baked bricks strengthened with straw, gravel, or potsherds. All mud structures, however, crumble easily when exposed to the elements, and that feature, combined with repeated wholesale destruction from man-made or natural causes, made repairs and rebuildings frequent. Earlier debris was simply leveled off, and new buildings were erected on top of it. Thus, most tells are stratified, with the lower strata usually being older than those above them.¹

My focus here is on archaeological finds that have a more direct connection with the Bible. I am concentrating on finds that connect to specific people, places, and events mentioned in Scripture. I do not include discoveries of biblical towns, cities, and people groups unless there is something additional that in my judgment makes those finds particularly noteworthy. I will begin with finds or sites that are relevant to the patriarchal period and proceed chronologically.²

I. From Abraham to the Sojourn in Egypt (2166 – 1876 B.C.)

A. Dating the Patriarchs

1. Solomon's temple begun – 966 B.C.

a. The Battle of Qarqar, in which the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III fought a coalition of forces, can be dated reliably to 853 B.C. A key to that dating is the solar eclipse that Assyrian records report occurred during the ninth year of Assyrian king Ashur-dan III. Running the celestial mechanics backwards allows the date of that eclipse to be pegged to June 15, 763 B.C. Knowing that Ashur-dan III's ninth year was 763 allows one to determine from chronologies of Assyrian kings when Shalmaneser III reigned and when the Battle of Qarqar in which he fought occurred.

b. We know Ahab was ruling Israel (northern kingdom) during this battle because Shalmaneser identifies him by name as one of his opponents in his annals of the campaign known as the Stela of Shalmaneser III (Kurkh Stele). So Ahab was on the throne in 853. We also know from the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III that in a military campaign he conducted in his 18th year, which means 841 B.C., Jehu paid tribute

¹ *Britannica* online, [Tell](#).

² The sources consulted in this study are referred to in the text, cited in footnotes, or listed at the end of the paper. The photographs were taken from the Internet.

to him, so we know Jehu was on the throne of Israel in 841. Scripture reveals that twelve years separated the reigns of Ahab and Jehu (2 Ki. 3:1), so we know that 853 B.C. was the last year of Ahab's reign, and 841 B.C. was the first year of Jehu's reign.

c. One can work back from this to the date Jeroboam I began to reign in the northern kingdom of Israel, which was 931/930 B.C. Since he began to reign when Solomon died and Rehoboam assumed the reign of the southern kingdom of Judah, one can date Solomon's death at 931/930 B.C. Since Solomon reigned for 40 years (1 Ki. 11:42), one can determine that he began to reign in 971/970 B.C. 1 Kings 6:1 says Solomon began to build the temple in the fourth year of his reign, which makes the date around 966 B.C.

2. The Exodus – **1446 B.C.** 1 Kings 6:1 states that Solomon began to build the temple 480 years after the Exodus. 480 years before 966 yields the date 1446 B.C.

3. Beginning of Israel's sojourn in Egypt (Jacob's migration there) – **1876 B.C.** Exodus 12:40-41 specifies that the Israelites were in Egypt for 430 years before the Exodus. 430 years before 1446 yields the date of 1876.³

4. Abraham's birth – **2166 B.C.** Genesis 47:9 reveals that Jacob was 130 when he went to Egypt. So he was 130 in the year 1876, meaning he was born in 2006. Genesis 25:20, 26 say Isaac was 60 when Jacob was born in 2006, which means Isaac was born in 2066. Genesis 21:6 says Abraham was 100 when Isaac was born, so Abraham was born in 2166.

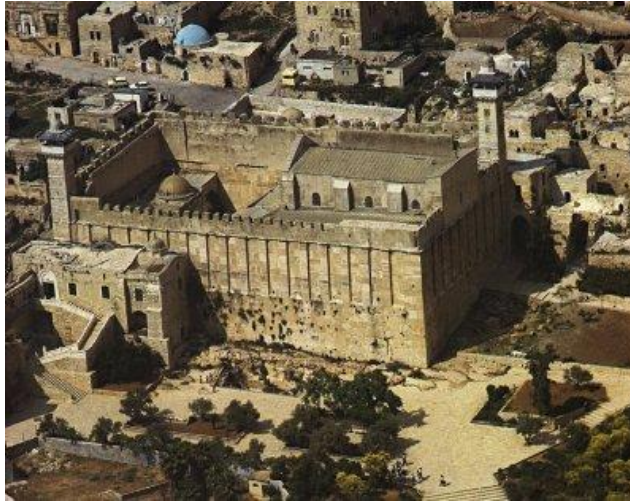
B. Abraham's Family Tomb

The cave/field of Machpelah is the burial place of at least Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Leah (Genesis 23, 25:8-10, 49:29-33, 50:12-13). (Rachel was not buried there because of her sudden death during childbirth near Bethlehem – Gen. 35:19.) This tomb is very likely located in Hebron at the site of the Muslim mosque known as Haram el-Khalil.

In the first century B.C., Herod the Great built an enclosure wall around the area and erected monuments in honor of the patriarchal figures. A church was built on the site in the fifth or sixth century A.D., which was later converted into a mosque, converted back to a church, and then converted back into a mosque.

³ Galatians 3:17 means the law was introduced at Sinai 430 years after the period of the giving *and renewal* of the Abrahamic covenant to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, not after its initial promulgation in Gen. 12:1-3. In Gleason Archer's words, "Paul is simply referring to the well-known period of the Egyptian sojourn, which separated the patriarchal age from the lawgiving at Mount Sinai." Gleason Archer, "The Chronology of the Old Testament" in Frank E. Gaebelin, ed., *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979) 1:363.

The underground chambers where the patriarchal figures would have been entombed have received little investigation. The first recorded exploration of the cave was done by Augustinian monks in A.D. 1119. In 1967, after the Six-Day War, Moshe Dayan lowered a twelve-year-old girl with a flashlight into the underground chamber, and she described an arrangement similar to that recorded by the monks.



C. Mention of Abraham in Shishak (Shoshenq I) Inscription

In 1825 an inscription dating from about 925 B.C. was found at the temple of Amon in Thebes (modern Luxor), Egypt.



In that inscription, Pharaoh Shishak (Shoshenq I) boasts about places in Israel and Judah that he had conquered. K. A. Kitchen states:

The only suggested extrabiblical mention of Abraham is in the topographical list of Shoshenq I (Shishak) of Egypt in 925, giving what may be read as "The Enclosure of Abraham," and which is fairly widely accepted. But this is not absolutely certain; it could be interpreted "Enclosure of the Stallions" (*'abbirim*), although the Negev region where this place was located is not exactly famous for horses. However, the Negev is mentioned as one of Abraham's haunts (Gen. 12:9; 13:1, 3; 20:1; also Isaac then, 24:62), which would well fit with a place being named after him.⁴

D. Cities of the Plain

Sodom, Gomorrah, and Zoar (aka Bela) are three of the five cities known as the "five cities of the plain," which Scripture locates in the plain on the eastern and southern side of the Dead Sea, the other two being Admah and Zeboiim. These cities were east of Gaza (Gen. 10:19), associated with the Dead Sea (Gen. 14:3, 8, 10), south of Jerusalem (Ezek. 16:46), and south of Mount Nebo (Deut. 34:1-3). They are mentioned in the narratives involving Abraham and Lot (Gen. 10:19, 13:10-14:24, 18:16-19:29). The oldest map of the Holy Land, a mosaic floor map from a church in Madaba, Jordan that dates to the mid-500s, has Zoar on the eastern side of the bottom of the Dead Sea. And both Josephus and Eusebius placed Zoar on the southeast side of the Dead Sea.⁵ These cities most likely are the modern sites of Bab edh-Dhra, Numeira, Safi, Feifa, and Khanazir, all of which appear to have been occupied around the time of Abraham.⁶



⁴ K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 313-314.

⁵ Titus Kennedy, *The Essential Archaeological Guide to Bible Lands* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2023), 266.

⁶ Images are from Joel Kramer, "[Sodom burned—Zoar did NOT: The full story of the discovery of the Cities of the Plain!](#)"

Genesis 19 reports that two angels appearing as men went to the city of Sodom and were taken by Lot to his home. When the men of Sodom sought to rape them, the angels blinded them, and the next day they escorted Lot, his wife, and his two daughters out of the city because they, as God's agents, were going to destroy it. Lot was allowed to flee to the small nearby city of Zoar, also known as Bela, which the angels promised would not be destroyed. And then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire and overthrew all the valley, meaning the cities other than Zoar (Gen. 19:24-25).

Archaeology indicates that four of the five cities located south and east of the Dead Sea "were destroyed probably around the beginning of the Middle Broze Age,"⁷ right at the time of Abraham. The one that was not destroyed is positively identified as Zoar by both the Madaba Map and inscriptions on Byzantine Greek headstones that name the place.⁸ Archaeologist Titus Kennedy says of Bab edh-Dhra:

The manner of destruction, however, is one of the most unique findings that suggests the identification of Bab edh-Dhra with Sodom. Not only was there evidence of extensive burning excavated at the site and flammable "sulfur balls" found around the area, but the cemetery at Bab edh-Dhra . . . revealed possible information about the populace and fate of the city. A startling discovery made during the examination of tombs at the cemetery was that the charnel houses (repositories for bones or dead bodies) had been burned on the inside, which seemed odd because the cemetery was a sacred area. Initially it was hypothesized that the burning may have been periodically done inside to cleanse the tombs. Yet upon further analysis, especially from tomb A22, the fire seemed to have started on top of the roofs and then fallen down into the structures, burning the insides of the walls. This phenomenon correlates with the description that fire rained down from the sky onto Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding area, further suggesting the possibility that evidence for the destruction of Sodom has been found (Genesis 19:24).⁹

After the destruction, the city was never again inhabited.¹⁰ Numeira is about eight miles south of Bab edh-Dhra and is a good candidate for the ancient city of Gomorrah. Kennedy states:

Excavations at Numeira discovered houses, a winery, fortifications, and signs of fiery destruction with ruined buildings and a layer of burnt material at least 30 cm thick. When sections of the city were excavated, discoveries such as complete pottery vessels, textiles, rope, axe heads, sickle blades, grinding stones, and ovens were uncovered, indicating the sudden destruction of the city and its residents. The scale of the

⁷ Kennedy (2023), 266.

⁸ Ibid., 267.

⁹ Ibid., 269-270.

¹⁰ Ibid., 269.

destruction was evident not only from the fire and a collapsed tower, but from human bone fragments found in various areas of the destruction layer, including two complete human skeletons in the debris of the tower, which suggests significant loss of life. Comparisons with findings at Bad edh-Dhra indicate that the two cities suffered a destruction and burning around the same time. Numeira was never rebuilt and remained an abandoned ruin.¹¹

Archaeologist Joel Kramer states that the geologists who worked at the excavations of Bab edh-Dhra and Numeira, named Clapp and Donahue, concluded "that there was an earthquake that then ignited and brought up the sulfur, kind of like popcorn, and caught it on fire and that it came raining down – and also the petroleum and bitumen that was in the ground came up. That was their explanation for how these cities got burned through a natural disaster."¹²

Some archaeologists who accept the biblical account as true resist the identification of Bab edh-Dhra and Numeira with Sodom and Gomorrah because they believe radiocarbon dating places the destruction of those cities before the time of Abraham.¹³ But the radiocarbon dates are not definitive. Kennedy states:

Calibrated radiocarbon dates for the region, however, are still being adjusted and understood, and should not be used to overturn the evidence from the dated pottery discovered at the sites. . . . [T]herefore it is plausible that the destruction occurred sometime around 1900 BC, when the biblical chronology associated with Abraham places the obliteration of Sodom and Gomorrah.¹⁴

II. Israel in Egypt and the Exodus (1876 – 1446 B.C.)

A. Chronologies

Using certain securely dated historical events, one can derive from Scripture absolute dates for events involving the patriarchs and the Exodus.¹⁵ With less certainty, one also can establish an absolute chronology for the reigns of various Egyptian

¹¹ Ibid., 270.

¹² Joel Kramer, "[Sodom burned—Zoar did NOT: The full story of the discovery of the Cities of the Plain!](#)"

¹³ Some propose Tall el-Hammam, which is northeast of the Dead Sea, as the site of Sodom, but this identification is fraught with problems. See, e.g., Simon Turpin, [Biblical Problems with Identifying Tall el-Hammam as Sodom](#), *Answers Research Journal* (March 10, 2021) and Bryant Wood, [Locating Sodom: A Critique of the Northern Proposal](#) (from Summer 2007 issue of *Bible and Spade*).

¹⁴ Kennedy (2023), 271. See also, Kris J. Udd, "[Bab edh-Dhra', Numeira, and the Biblical Patriarchs: a Chronological Study](#)," Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University (2011).

¹⁵ See, e.g., Andrew E. Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul: A Biblical Chronology* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2011), 67-86.

Pharaohs. Archaeologist Douglas Petrovich, who has studied the subject for many years, argues in detail for an Egyptian chronology that fits neatly with the biblical storyline.¹⁶

DATE	EVENT	REIGN	PHARAOH
2166	Abraham born in Ur		
2091	Abraham enters Canaan		
2066	Isaac born		
2006	Jacob and Esau born		
1991	Abraham dies		
		12th Dynasty	
		1979-1950	Amenemhat I
		1960-1916	Sesostris I
1915	Joseph born	1919-1884	Amenemhat II
1898	Joseph sold into Egypt		
1886	Isaac dies	1887-1878	Sesostris II
1885	Joseph made ruler in Egypt		
1876	Jacob & family move to Egypt	1878-1840	Sesostris III
1859	Jacob dies in Egypt	1859-1813	Amenemhat III
		1814-1805	Amenemhat IV
1805	Joseph dies in Egypt	1805-1801	Queen Sobekneferu
		15th Dynasty	
		1668-1560	The Hyksos
		18th Dynasty	
		1560-1550	Ahmose
1529	Aaron born	1550-1529	Amenhotep I
1526	Moses born	1529-1516	Thutmose I
		1516-1504	Thutmose II
		1504/2 - 1483	Queen Hatshepsut
1486	Moses flees to Midian	1504-1450	Thutmose III
1446	Moses returns & the Exodus	1453-1416	Amenhotep II
		1416-1407	Thutmose IV
1406	Moses dies	1407-1370	Amenhotep III
		1370-1353	Amenhotep IV = Akhenaten
		1353-1350	Smenkhkare
		1350-1347	Neferneferuaten
		1347-1338	Tutankhamun
		1338-1334	Ay
		1334-1307	Horemheb

Petrovich's proposed Egyptian chronology is within the bounds of mainstream archaeology and Egyptology. In other words, he is not arguing, like David Rohl and John Bimson, that the conventional Egyptian timeline is radically skewed, off by hundreds of years. Rather, he presents historical evidence for dating the reigns of the Pharaohs within the generally accepted framework of Egyptian history. All of his dates are plausible and would find support among mainstream archaeologists and Egyptologists. For example, his reigns for the 18th Dynasty vary by only a few years from those given in the *Cambridge Ancient History*, "a publication produced by impartial scholars and

¹⁶ The dates for the reigns of the Pharaohs are from Douglas Petrovich, *Origins of the Hebrews: New Evidence of Israelites in Egypt from Joseph to the Exodus* (Nashville: New Creation, 2021), 214. For supporting evidence, see pp. 24-32 and Douglas Petrovich, "[Amenhotep II and the Historicity of the Exodus Pharaoh](#)" (Feb. 4, 2010).

recognized as impeccable authority."¹⁷ Richard Lobban, Professor of Anthropology and African Studies at Rhode Island College, dates the reign of the key figure Amenhotep II from 1453/1450 to 1425/1419.¹⁸ Many similar examples could be provided.

B. Difficulty in Distinguishing Israelites at This Stage

You see that Abraham entered Canaan (2091) over two centuries (215 years) before Jacob's family moved into Egypt (1876). They dwelled largely in tents in the region and were predominantly keepers of livestock. But since Lot, who like Abraham had flocks and herds, resided in the city of Sodom, perhaps others likewise dwelled in cities. In any event, they lived among the various people groups in Canaan for a long time and no doubt added aspects of Canaanite culture to the Mesopotamian culture that Abraham and his family had brought with them.

This is before the giving of the Mosaic Law, which Paul described in Eph. 2:14 as a "dividing wall" between the Jews and Gentiles. In other words, the Mosaic Law isolated the Israelites from the surrounding cultures which made them more distinctive and thus potentially more readily identifiable in the archaeological record. Those distinctives of later Israelite culture were not part of patriarchal life and thus are not available as markers of Israelite presence.

Moreover, given the kindness and goodwill shown to Jacob's family by Pharaoh when they entered Egypt in 1876, one can imagine the Israelites being favorably disposed to Egyptian culture. When one adds the fact the Israelites in Egypt engaged in idol worship (Josh. 24:14; Ezek. 20:5-10, 23:3; see also, Ex. 32:1; Lev. 17:7; Ps. 106:7; Acts 7:39-43), it becomes very difficult to distinguish them by archaeological remains from other Canaanite groups that may have been in Egypt.

This puts a different light on the frequent charge that there is no evidence of Israelites in Egypt. As archaeologist James Hoffmeier states:

Archaeology's ability to determine the ethnicity of a people in the archaeological record, especially of the Israelites at such an early period, is quite limited. Assuming the Israelites were in Egypt during Egypt's New Kingdom (c. 1540–1200 B.C.), what kind of pottery would they have used? What house plans would they have lived in? What sort of burial traditions did they practice? And would archaeologists be able to identify the burial of these early Israelites who ended up as slaves anyway? And

¹⁷ Eugene H. Merrill, *A Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 58-59.

¹⁸ Richard A. Lobban, Jr., *Historical Dictionary of Ancient and Medieval Nubia* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2004), 28.

how are all these things different from those of Canaanites or other Semitic-speaking peoples in Egypt at this time?¹⁹

C. Improbability of Documentary Evidence of Their Presence

The fact the Israelites were concentrated in the damp eastern Delta of Egypt, called the Land of Rameses²⁰ (Gen. 47:11) and Goshen (Gen. 45:10, 47:4, 6; Ex. 8:22; 9:26), makes it very unlikely that any papyrus writings documenting their presence would have survived. In 2012, James Hoffmeier reported that after more than 35 years Manfred Bietak's team excavating at the Delta site of Tell el-Dab'a has not discovered *any* papyri and that Edgar Pusch's team had not discovered any after nearly 25 years of excavating at the sister site of Qantir.²¹

As for carved monuments, it would be surprising to find a reference to foreign inhabitants, especially those that eventually became slaves and were associated with the humiliating defeat of the Exodus. Even if such references had existed, one can imagine they would be systematically removed or destroyed, as was done with references to Queen Hatshepsut.

D. Tell el-Dab'a (Rowaty, Avaris, Peru-nefer, and Rameses)

With those limitations in mind, the excavations at Tell el-Dab'a are far more significant than is often recognized. Petrovich says this "is the most thoroughly excavated site in the entire ANE."²² There were excavations in 1885, 1941-1942, and 1951-1954, but the major work there was done by the Austrian Manfred Bietak from 1966-1969 and then from 1975-2009. The work has since continued at the site under the direction of Irene Forstner-Müller.²³

Tell el-Dab'a was occupied for centuries, during which time it expanded and became known by different names (Rowaty, Avaris, Peru-nefer, and Rameses). The excavations show that in the mid-19th century B.C., right around the time Scripture says Jacob and his family moved to Egypt, there was an influx of people from Canaan to this location. The people from Canaan who inhabited this site sometimes are referred to in the literature as "Asiatics." That is a kind of catch-all category that Egyptians used for inhabitants of the Levant (the region of Syria and Palestine) and Mesopotamia. The "Asiatics" at Tell el-Dab'a are for various reasons understood to have come from the Levant, an area encompassing the land of Canaan, the land in which Abraham and his descendants resided.

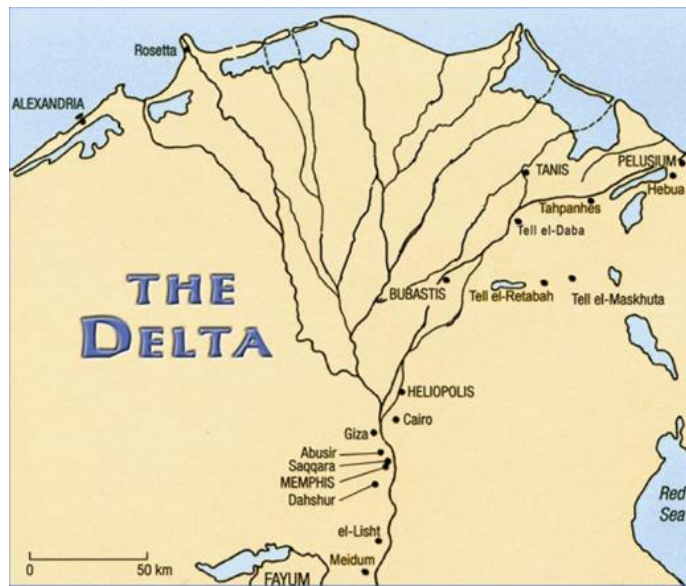
¹⁹ James K. Hoffmeier, "Out of Egypt" in Dorothy Resig, editor, *Ancient Israel in Egypt and the Exodus* (Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 2012), 3.

²⁰ Also spelled Ramses and Ramesses.

²¹ Hoffmeier (2012), 4-5.

²² Petrovich (2021), 36.

²³ Petrovich (2021), 36.



Bietak describes the site as "a settlement constructed at the beginning of the 12th Dynasty and completely re-settled by Canaanites from the late 12th Dynasty onwards."²⁴ Petrovich states, "No Egyptologist or ANE historian disputes that Asiatics from the Levant settled at Avaris late in Dynasty 12 and persisted there for centuries."²⁵ Archaeologist Bryant Wood says of the 19th-century settlement at Tell el-Dab'a:

About 82 acres in size, it was unfortified, although there were many enclosure walls, most likely for keeping animals. The living quarters consisted of small rectangular buildings built of sand bricks. Neutron activation analysis indicates that Palestinian-type pottery from the village originated in southern Palestine, and Bietak notes that the presence of handmade cooking pots is evidence of a nomadic pastoral population. He further observes that these "foreigners" could not have settled there without Egyptian consent.²⁶

About 20% of the pottery found at the settlement was of Palestinian type, and 50% of the male burials included weapons of Syrian-Palestinian type.²⁷ Clyde Billington says about the "four-room houses" discovered at the site:

For one example of the archaeological evidence of the existence of Israelites in Egypt—an example Petrovich cites—Bietak has excavated four-room houses at Tell el-Dab'a/Avaris/Ramses dating to the Middle and Late Bronze Ages, and only Israelites are known to have built four-

²⁴ Manfred Bietak, "Egypt and the Levant" in Toby Wilkinson, editor, *The Egyptian World* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 422.

²⁵ Petrovich (2021), 38.

²⁶ Bryant G. Wood, "[From Ramesses to Shiloh: Archaeological Discoveries Bearing on the Exodus-Judges Period](#)" (Apr. 2, 2008).

²⁷ Ibid.; Petrovich (2021), 232.

room houses. Incidentally, many four-room houses dating to the Iron Age have also been found in archaeological excavations in Israel. No other ethnic group is known to have built four-room houses. The presence of four-room houses in Egypt argues conclusively for the presence of Israelites in Egypt during the Middle and Late Bronze periods.²⁸

The largest building in the community was a palatial residence with twin master bedrooms. It is plausible, as Petrovich argues, that Joseph's sons Ephraim and Manasseh, who were born and raised in Egypt, moved to Rowaty/Avaris when their grandfather Jacob, near the end of his life, claimed them as his own children (Gen. 48:5-6, 21). In that event, this large house was most likely their residence. Petrovich remarks:

The constructional reality of twin master bedrooms makes little sense in the case of an ordinary resident, even an affluent one. Yet it makes perfect sense if the building was the joint residence of two incredibly wealthy brothers who arrived at the site simultaneously and from the beginning built the structure with both of them in mind as primary residents. If Ephraim and Manasseh moved to Avaris just as Jacob was dying, or soon after he had died, one easily can envision them levelling Jacob's Asiatic house, then for sentimental reasons, splitting the position of their bedrooms directly over the middle of where their deceased grandfather's house once stood.²⁹

There was in the village a large statue, almost two times life size, of a seated Asiatic dignitary. It had been deliberately destroyed and fragments of it were found in several tombs, but its original location and why it was destroyed are not known.³⁰ Wood says of the statue:

The likeness was of a seated official 1½ times life size. It was made of limestone and exhibited excellent workmanship. The skin was yellow, the traditional color of Asiatics in Egyptian art. It had a mushroom-shaped hairstyle, painted red, typical of that shown in Egyptian artwork for Asiatics. A throwstick, the Egyptian hieroglyph for a foreigner, was held against the right shoulder. The statue had been intentionally smashed and defaced (Bietak 1996: 20–21).³¹

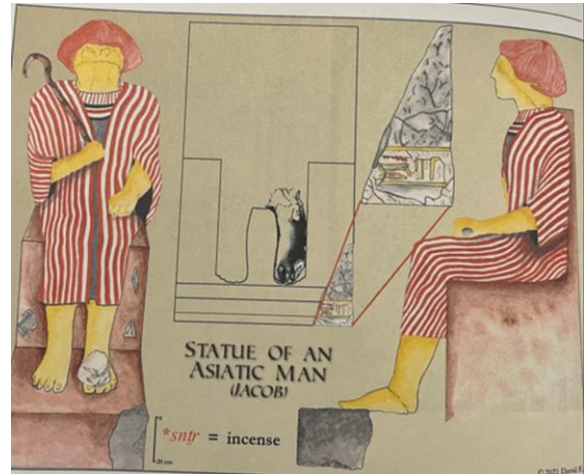
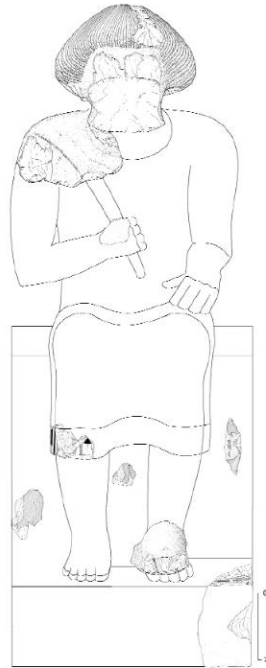
²⁸ Clyde Billington, [Book Review: *Origins of the Hebrews: New Evidence of Israelites in Egypt from Joseph to the Exodus*](#) (Nov. 21, 2022); see also, Petrovich (2021), 205. Kennedy (2020), 243, gives the Middle Bronze Age as 2000-1500 B.C. and the Late Bronze Age as 1500-1200 B.C.

²⁹ Petrovich (2021), 91. Petrovich bolsters the claim of Ephraim's presence in Rowaty/Avaris by identifying Joseph as the Egyptian high official Sobekemhat. The Asiatic ruler of Rowaty/Avaris, whose tomb was excavated there, is named Di-Sobekemhat, which name Petrovich contends means "He whom Sobekemhat appointed." Joseph appointing Ephraim to such a position fits with Ephraim being given the blessing ahead of his older brother Manasseh (Gen. 48:1-20). See, Petrovich (2021), 49-94.

³⁰ Robert Schiestl, "The Statue of an Asiatic Man from Tell el-Dab'a, Egypt," *Egypt and the Levant* 16 (2006), 173-185.

³¹ Bryant G. Wood, ["The Sons of Jacob: New Evidence for the Presence of the Israelites in Egypt"](#) (Jan. 28, 2016).

Here is the proposed reconstruction from the available fragments and an illustration of the statue by David Graves.



Petrovich argues from the likely dating of the statue to the reign of Amenemhat III, the fact it was of an Asiatic, the fact it was made in honor of a deceased person, as indicated by the word "incense" which was part of an offering formula for the dead, and the fact Jacob's body was taken to Canaan for burial, which would have created a sense of loss among those in Avaris, that the statue was created in honor of Jacob.³² Recall that he was held in high regard by Israelites and Egyptians. When he died, the Egyptians wept for him for seventy days (Gen. 50:3). Joseph was accompanied on the journey to bury Jacob by "all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household, and all the elders of the land of Egypt" (Gen. 50:7), and the Canaanites said of the lamenting at the threshing floor of Atad, "This is grievous mourning by the Egyptians" (Gen. 50:11). Petrovich suggests Jacob had been appointed to some administrative position in Avaris.

The Asiatic community at Tell el-Dab'a grew quickly from its initial settlement in the mid-19th century and spread eastward. The presence of Hebrews in Egypt around this time is corroborated by what is known as the Brooklyn Papyrus, which was discovered in Egypt. It dates from the 17th century B.C. and includes a list of domestic servants. Kennedy states:

A section of this papyrus contains a list of 95 servants, many of whom are specified as Asiatic or coming from western Asia (primarily Canaan). The servants with foreign names are given Egyptian names, just

³² Petrovich (2021), 46-48, 91-93.

as Joseph was after he was promoted from a household servant under Potiphar to the role of vizier over all Egypt. The majority of the names are feminine because domestic servants were typically female.

Approximately 30 of the servants have names identified as Semitic, but more relevant to the Exodus story is that 9 of these servants have specifically Hebrew names. . . .

Therefore, this list is a clear attestation of Hebrews living in Egypt prior to the Exodus under Moses, in their earlier period of residence in the country prior to their total enslavement, and perhaps shows that a group may have migrated south or was taken south for work.³³

Around 1668 B.C. a different group of Asiatics, known as the Hyksos, occupied the adjoining area to the northeast and seized control of the government of northern (lower) Egypt. The site was by then called Avaris, and it served as the center of the Hyksos' dynasty, complete with a substantial palace complex that they built. The Hyksos and the earlier group of Asiatics coexisted and prospered at Avaris throughout the Hyksos' approximately 108-year rule in Egypt, which came to be known as the 15th Dynasty of Egypt.

Around 1560 B.C., Ahmose, a ruler in southern (upper) Egypt, succeeded in removing the hated Hyksos from power. He destroyed their citadel and expelled them from Egypt. This marks the establishment of the 18th Egyptian Dynasty. At that time, the native Egyptians began rebuilding the royal Hyksos' capital of Avaris, which eventually became a royal citadel for them, from which they launched many military campaigns into the Levant. The ancient historical sources agree that the Hyksos were driven out of Egypt and retreated to Sharuhin in southern Canaan, near Gaza.³⁴ But some Asiatics continued to occupy Avaris. Petrovich states:

A strong case can be made for the occupational continuity of a part of Avaris's Asiatic population after the political break caused by Ahmose's conquest of Avaris and his eradication of the Hyksos dynasts and initiation of Egypt's NK [New Kingdom]. The NK began with the native Egyptian rule of Dynasty 18, immediately after the expulsion of the Hyksos. A comparative study of the material culture of the late Hyksos period and the early NK at Tell el-Dab'a and Tell Hebwa shows unbroken continuity that continues into the Thutmosid period (Bietak 2011: 32), which Bietak (2010c: 15, 22) defined as the reigns of Thutmose III and Amenhotep II. All of this can be accepted as true beyond reasonable doubt.

For example, after the political turning point when Avaris was seized by Ahmose, the cultural mix of ceramic production at the site, which was typical of the eastern Delta, continued unbroken until the Thutmosid period (Bietak 2010c: 15). Archaeologically, this is indisputable. Asiatic cultural continuity is attested at Avaris before and

³³ Titus Kennedy, *Unearthing the Bible* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2020), 48-49.

³⁴ Petrovich (2021), 14, 139, 220-228.

after the transition from Hyksos to native Egyptian rule in Avaris and the Nile Delta.³⁵

Bietak attributes this cultural continuity to Hyksos people who remained at Avaris after the Hyksos dynasty ended, but that claim contradicts the ancient historical sources that insist the Hyksos were driven out. It also is based on dubious arguments and does not account for other evidence suggesting that the remaining Asiatics were non-Hyksos people, or more specifically, Israelites.³⁶ Petrovich concludes:

Therefore, after taking all of this material-cultural and epigraphical evidence into account, non-Hyksos Asiatics clearly predated the Hyksos at Avaris (beginning with Dynasty 12) and outlasted them at the site (during the first half of Dynasty 18), and the evidence presented earlier in this volume demonstrates that their true identity is Israelite, those who descended from Jacob according to the non-fictional account of their origins recorded in the biblical text that Moses wrote no later than 1406 BC.³⁷

E. The Pharaoh Who Enslaved the Israelites

It seems likely that Ahmose was the Pharaoh who did not know Joseph referred to in Ex. 1:8. It is possible he literally did not know of Joseph, since Joseph had been dead for about 245 years (1805-1560) and Ahmose was from Thebes which is a long way from the Delta (about 380 miles from Tell el-Dab'a). But the verse may mean he did not "know" Joseph in the figurative sense of he did not recognize any obligation toward him.

Having just overthrown the Hyksos, foreign rulers who were Asiatics, one can see how Ahmose would be concerned that the non-Hyksos Asiatics in the Delta might be persuaded to side with the Hyksos in the event of further conflict. That fits well with Pharaoh's rationale for enslaving the Israelites in Ex. 1:9-11a: ⁹ *And he said to his people, "Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. ¹⁰ Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and [take possession of] the land."* ¹¹ *Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens.*

The bracketed phrase is based on OT scholar Douglas Stuart's argument that the Hebrew phrase literally rendered "go up from the land" is an idiom that has to do with "people rising up over the land, that is, overcoming, overwhelming, or dominating it." The same Hebrew phrase in Hos. 1:11 is translated in the NRSV as "they shall take

³⁵ Petrovich (2021), 221.

³⁶ Petrovich (2021), 220-237.

³⁷ Petrovich (2021), 236-237.

possession of the land."³⁸ The NET note to Hos. 1:11 states: "Alternatively, 'gain possession of the land' (cf. NRSV) or 'rise up from the land' (cf. NIV). This clause may be understood in two ways: (1) Israel will gain ascendancy over the land or conquer the land (e.g., Exod 1:10; cf. NAB 'come up from other lands') or (2) Israel will be 'planted' in the land (Hos 2:24–25; cf. NLT 'will...plant his people')."

I do not think the point is, "We must enslave them or else they will fight with our enemies against us *and leave the land*." The Israelites had been there voluntarily for centuries, so if they had not been enslaved, they presumably would have remained. And if the Israelites and their allies defeated the Egyptians, it seems the Egyptians would be pleased to have them leave the land. On the other hand, if the Israelites and their allies were defeated by the Egyptians, it seems they could leave the land only if the Egyptians allowed them to do so. Taking the clause idiomatically, the focus is not on the Israelites leaving the country but on them defeating the Egyptians and ruling the land with their coalition partner.

If the Asiatics at Avaris were enslaved after Ahmose defeated the Hyksos, they may have been relocated to more temporary work-site quarters that have not survived or were in an area that has not been excavated. That would explain the "hiatus" in the archaeological record in the areas where they resided at Avaris prior to the Hyksos expulsion. They certainly would be needed as laborers given the construction of the Egyptian palaces at the site and the conversion of the city into a "store city" (see below).

If it was Ahmose who enslaved the Israelites, then the time of their slavery was about 114 years. Genesis 15:13 (also Acts 7:6) need not mean that the Israelites' *slavery* was 400 years. Rather, the 400 years is a round number for the 430 years they would spend in Egypt as specified in Ex. 12:40-41. The time of their being enslaved and mistreated was an unspecified part of that time.³⁹ This is expressed in the NIV rendering: *Then the LORD said to him, "Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there."* They will be in Egypt for 400 years (430 rounded down), but the length of their enslavement is not specified. CSB is similar: *Then the Lord said to Abram, "Know this for certain: Your offspring will be resident aliens for four hundred years in a land that does not belong to them and will be enslaved and oppressed."*

F. "Asiatic" Presence Elsewhere in the Delta

Avaris is only one of many Delta cities where these Asiatics may have resided. In fact, in the narrow fertile band known as the Wadi Tumilat that extends eastward from the easternmost Nile tributary, 21 of the 71 sites excavated yielded materials identified with the Levant during the time from about 1800 to 1550. Canaanite remains were found

³⁸ See Douglas Stuart's discussion of the issue in *Exodus*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 65-66. See also, NJPS footnote which gives as a possible alternative translation "gain ascendancy over the country."

³⁹ See footnote 3 regarding Gal. 3:17.

at Tell el-Maskhuta from roughly 1830 down to 1750, and it is clear that an Asiatic element resided at Tell el-Yehudiyeh during the time from roughly 1800 down to the Hyksos expulsion. Interestingly, Tell el-Yehudiyeh is Arabic for "mound of the Jew," perhaps reflecting a faint memory of an ancient Jewish presence in the area. A nearby cemetery dated to 1700-1600 contained ceramic remains of a Palestinian type and is thought by archaeologist Olga Tufnell to be a burial site for "a poor community of shepherds."⁴⁰

So there is significant circumstantial evidence supporting an Israelite presence in Egypt during the time the Bible puts them there. Wood points out that archaeology has provided evidence of "the right culture in the right place at the right time." We have Canaanites in the eastern Delta during the time of the Israelite sojourn described in Scripture. That is quite a coincidence. Speaking specifically of Tell el-Dab'a, Wood says, "Without identifying inscriptions, we will never know for sure if the Str. d/2 people were Israelites. This much we can say, however. The finds represent exactly what we would expect to find from Israelite occupation in Egypt."⁴¹ Petrovich is more confident that they can be identified as Israelites.

G. Pithom

The store city of Pithom that the Israelite slaves were forced to build (Ex. 1:11) is thought by many scholars to be located at Tell el-Retabah. That site was excavated by a Polish-Slovak team of archaeologists from 2008-2017. It was discovered that around 1600 B.C., in the latter half of the 15th Dynasty (Hyksos' rule), a city was founded at Retaba and occupied by Semites⁴² originally from the Levant. They found that adults were sometimes buried with sheep, which suggests the importance of sheep in the people's lives (cf. Gen. 46:34-47:6). They also found that the Semitic population in both the 15th and 18th Dynasties did not bury their infants in jars, a practice that was common at the time in Canaan but was not typical of Israelite settlements.⁴³ Kennedy states:

At the beginning of the 18th Dynasty, around 1570 BC or so, Egyptians reclaimed the region, new construction commenced, and the size of the city expanded (Exodus 1:8-11). Many structures were built out of mud brick, and presumably the Semites there were conscripted into forced labor as was common throughout Egypt during the New Kingdom period (Exodus 1:13-14; 5:5-19). In addition to houses and huts for residents, archaeologists have also excavated many round storage silos with structural diameters ranging from about one meter to three meters

⁴⁰ James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 65-67.

⁴¹ Wood, "[The Sons of Jacob: New Evidence for the Presence of the Israelites in Egypt](#)" (Jan. 28, 2016).

⁴² *Encyclopedia Britannica*, [Semite](#), states: "Semite, name given in the 19th century to a member of any people who speak one of the Semitic languages, a family of languages spoken primarily in parts of western Asia and Africa. The term therefore came to include Arabs, Akkadians, Canaanites, Hebrews, some Ethiopians (including the Amhara and the Tigrayans), and Aramaean tribes."

⁴³ Kennedy (2023), 87-89.

[about 3 to 10 feet], built using mud bricks. Similarities to other government-constructed silos elsewhere in Egypt indicate that these were commissioned by the royal administration. . . .

Then, in the middle of the dynasty, subsequent to Thutmose III and apparently during the reign of Amenhotep II, the city at Tell el-Retaba (Per-Atum/Pithom) was mysteriously abandoned. It was not until more than a century later, at the beginning of the 13th century BC during the reign of the 19th Dynasty Pharaoh Ramesses II, that the site was inhabited again. . . .

Due to its location in the Nile Delta or Goshen region, the name association with Per-Atum, its Semitic population, new construction at the beginning of the 18th Dynasty and then abandonment during the reign of Amenhotep II – perhaps about 1446 BC, when the exodus occurred – Tell el-Retaba was probably the site of Pithom where many Hebrews lived and labored before their exit from Egypt (Exodus 1:11; Numbers 33:1-8).⁴⁴

H. Rameses

The store city of Rameses mentioned in Ex. 1:11 is thought to be located at Tell el-Dab'a. At the time, the city was called Peru-nefer, the name the Egyptians gave to the Hyksos capital of Avaris after they defeated the Hyksos. Though Kennedy thinks the city may have been known as Rameses before the time of Rameses II,⁴⁵ as far as we know, it was not known as Rameses until the 13th century when Rameses II built the great city by that name just to the northeast (Qantir), which ended up absorbing Peru-nefer.

If Avaris/Peru-nefer was not known as Rameses until the 13th century, it raises the question of how Moses could write in the 15th century (Ex. 1:11) that Israelite slaves in the mid-16th century built the store city *of Rameses*. The answer is that they built the store city of Peru-nefer that later came to be known as Rameses. In other words, a scribe (or inspired editor) copying Exodus centuries after Moses wrote it, updated the name of the city to the name by which it was then known.⁴⁶ That seems clearly to have occurred in

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 82-83.

⁴⁶ NET note to Ex. 1:11 states:

Many scholars assume that because this city was named Rameses, the Pharaoh had to be Rameses II, and hence that a late date for the exodus (and a late time for the sojourn in Egypt) is proved. But if the details of the context are taken as seriously as the mention of this name, this cannot be the case. If one grants for the sake of discussion that Rameses II was on the throne and oppressing Israel, it is necessary to note that Moses is not born yet. It would take about twenty or more years to build the city, then eighty more years before Moses appears before Pharaoh (Rameses), and then a couple of years for the plagues – this man would have been Pharaoh for over a hundred years. That is clearly not the case for the historical Rameses II. But even more determining is the fact that whoever the Pharaoh was for whom the Israelites built the treasure cities, he died before Moses began the plagues. The Bible says that when Moses grew up and killed the Egyptian, he fled from Pharaoh (whoever that was) and remained in exile until he heard that that Pharaoh had died. So this verse cannot be used for a date of the exodus in the days of Rameses, unless many other details in the chapters are ignored. If it is argued that

Gen. 47:11, where it is said that Joseph settled his family in the "land of Rameses," referring to the eastern Delta, an event that occurred around 1876. The same phenomenon is evident in Gen. 14:14, where Abraham is said to have pursued the four kings as far as Dan. At that time, the city was named Laish; it was not named Dan until around 1100 B.C. when it was taken over by the tribe of Dan (Judg. 18:7, 27).

Massive storage facilities have been discovered at the site dating to the early 18th Dynasty. Excavators have found at least 30 round silos that are 17 feet in diameter. Bietak writes:

At the northern sections of our excavations, the platform C of the late Hyksos period had been taken down during the early 18th Dynasty and a storage compound set up on top of it. It consisted of at least 30 round grain silos and other silos were found beside the Palace in the south and at other places. Each silo was about 5.25 meters (10 cubits) in diameter. The silos were renewed up to four times which would speak in favor of a long time span. This amenity was used to store enormous quantities of grain and probably other foodstuff for a considerable number of people. It could have been a makeshift military facility for supplying troops.⁴⁷

1. Some Egyptian Rulers Associated with Moses

As we follow the biblical chronology down to the time of the Exodus and compare that to Petrovich's chronology of the Pharaohs, the two mesh together very neatly. We see that Aaron was born in 1529, the same year that Thutmose I succeeded Amenhotep I as Pharaoh. Since there is no mention of Aaron's life being in danger at birth, the decree to kill the male Israelite babies, which was in effect by the time Moses was born in 1526, must have been issued in that three-year window, presumably by the new Pharaoh Thutmose I. Here is a picture of his mummy and a statue of his head from the British Museum.

Rameses was the Pharaoh of the oppression, then his successor would have been the Pharaoh of the exodus. Rameses reigned from 1304 B.C. until 1236 and then was succeeded by Merneptah. That would put the exodus far too late in time, for the Merneptah stela refers to Israel as a settled nation in their land. One would have to say that the name Rameses in this chapter may either refer to an earlier king, or, more likely, reflect an updating in the narrative to name the city according to its later name (it was called something else when they built it, but later Rameses finished it and named it after himself [see B. Jacob, *Exodus*, 14]). For further discussion see G. L. Archer, "An 18th Dynasty Ramses," *JETS* 17 (1974): 49-50; and C. F. Aling, "The Biblical City of Ramses," *JETS* 25 (1982): 129-37. Furthermore, for vv. 11-14, see K. A. Kitchen, "From the Brick Fields of Egypt," *TynBul* 27 (1976): 137-47.

⁴⁷ Manfred Bietak, "[The Palatial Precinct at the Nile Branch \(Area H\)](#)."

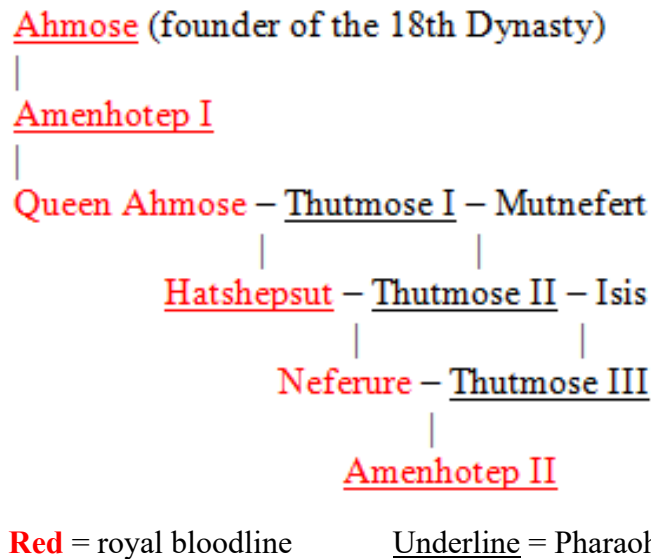


Hatshepsut was the daughter of Thutmose I and Queen Ahmose. She is almost certainly the daughter of Pharaoh who rescued Moses from the river and raised him in the palace as her stepson. Here is her mummy, which was positively identified in 2007, and a statue of her during better days, no doubt idealized to some degree.



Thutmose I was succeeded in 1516 by Thutmose II, who was Hatshepsut's half-brother, the son of Thutmose I by another woman (Mutnefert). To continue the royal bloodline, Hatshepsut and Thutmose II married. They produced a daughter, Neferure, but no son. Thutmose II had a son, Thutmose III, by another woman (Isis), but Thutmose III was only an infant or small child when his father died in 1504. Thutmose III formally assumed the throne, but his stepmother, Hatshepsut, who also was the stepmother of Moses, assumed the role of coregent until her death in 1483. Interestingly, examination of

her mummy suggests she died in her 50s, which would put her at 7 to 16 years of age when Moses was rescued. Here is a chart of the lineage that I created based on Wood's lecture "The Pharaohs of the Bondage."



In 1486 B.C., when Thutmose III was in his early twenties, Moses killed the Egyptian and fled to Midian because Thutmose intended to put him to death. Scripture says that during the many days that Moses was in Midian, the king of Egypt died (Ex. 2:23). Thutmose III reigned until 1450, which was 36 years after Moses fled to Midian. His son, Amenhotep II, who had served as a coregent with him during the final few years of his reign, succeeded him as Pharaoh. Four years later, in 1446, Moses returned to Egypt and as God's spokesman called on Amenhotep II to free the Israelites. Here is a statue of Amenhotep II and his mummy, which is in the Cairo Museum.



Two questions arise immediately regarding the claim that Amenhotep II was the Pharaoh of the Exodus. The first is how he could be the Pharaoh of the Exodus when he obviously did not drown in the Red Sea in 1446 but continued to reign until 1416. Indeed, his mummified body is still preserved. The answer is that Scripture does not make certain that Pharaoh died in the Red Sea at the time of the Exodus. It nowhere states that expressly, and the texts on which that conclusion is based leave ample room for doubt.

In Ex. 14:4 and 14:17-18 a distinction is drawn between Pharaoh and all his host, chariots, and horsemen. God says in those texts that he will get glory over not only Pharaoh but also over his military men who serve as the source of his strength. In that light, Ex. 14:23 probably should be (certainly can be) read to mean that those who went into the parted sea were the horses, chariots, and horsemen of Pharaoh rather than Pharaoh himself. According to Ex. 14:28, it was those chariots and horsemen who were killed, the host of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea (see also Ex. 15:4, 19).

All of these chariots, and presumably the horsemen as well, were under the command of officers (Ex. 14:7), so one need not speculate that Pharaoh actually led the pursuit into the sea rather than directing that pursuit from the rear. Ancients knew well the need to protect kings in battle (e.g., 2 Sam. 18:2-3; 1 Ki. 22:31-33), and though the Israelites were largely unarmed civilians, they were perceived as enough of a threat, given the power of the God they served, to warrant such a significant military force. Note that Ex. 15:4 speaks of the chariots of Pharaoh and his host being cast into the sea and then tellingly specifies that "his chosen officers" were sunk in the Red Sea without identifying Pharaoh himself as being among the dead.

Psalms 106:11 says simply that the waters of the Red Sea covered the adversaries who were pursuing the Israelites. It does not refer to Pharaoh. Psalm 136:15 says that God "shook off" (*nā'ar*) Pharaoh and his host *at* (*bē* can mean at or in) the Red Sea, meaning he there broke off their pursuit of Israel by drowning the host of Pharaoh that had followed Israel into the sea. It need not mean Pharaoh was among those who drown.

Certainly God did not have to kill Pharaoh to gain glory over him as mentioned in Ex. 14:4, 17-18. Administering a humiliating defeat of Pharaoh's great army at the hands of a rabble of largely unarmed and recently freed civilian slaves makes the point of God's supremacy quite well and leaves no doubt that God could take Pharaoh's life whenever he chose to do so.

The second question that arises regarding the claim that Amenhotep II was the Pharaoh of the Exodus is why he did not die in the tenth plague that killed all the firstborn of the Egyptians. The answer, as you might imagine, is that he was not the eldest son of Thutmose III. Thutmose III's firstborn son was Amenemhet, the older half-brother of Amenhotep II. He was in line for the throne but died before he could assume it.⁴⁸

Of course, if Amenhotep II was the Pharaoh of the Exodus, then his firstborn son would have died in the tenth plague. So if Amenhotep II's successor, Thutmose IV, was Amenhotep's firstborn son, Amenhotep could not be the Pharaoh of the Exodus. It turns out that is not a problem because Thutmose IV was not Amenhotep II's eldest son. This is clear from inscriptions and other written documentation.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ See Petrovich, "[Amenhotep II and the Historicity of the Exodus Pharaoh](#)" (Feb. 4, 2010).

⁴⁹ Ibid.

J. Tomb of Rekhmire

Pharaoh stubbornly refused God's demand through Moses to free the Israelites, and he increased their hardship by requiring them to gather their own straw but not reducing their quota of bricks. Interestingly, the only scene discovered in Egypt that shows the making of bricks is from the Tomb of Rekhmire, an official in Thebes, which dates to the reign of Amenhotep II. Kennedy says, "On this tomb mural . . . a variety of slaves, including Asiatic or Semitic slaves, perform tasks for Egyptians. In particular, the slaves make bricks using mud and straw formed in a mold, dried in the sun, and then transported for use in construction projects."⁵⁰



K. Sinai 361 Inscription

Serâbîṭ el-Khâdim in the southwest Sinai Peninsula was the location of a turquoise mine which the Egyptians exploited heavily from the 18th through the 20th Dynasties (so after the defeat of the Hyksos by Ahmose),⁵¹ with the use of slaves. In 1905, Flinders Petrie found inscriptions there in a proto-Sinaitic script (aka proto-consonantal script). Some date the inscriptions to the Middle Kingdom period (ca. 2025-1674 B.C.), but Petrovich states, "All the evidence examined regarding the inscriptions from Serâbîṭ el-Khâdim mitigates against their attribution to the Middle Kingdom, instead demanding that they be dated to the New Kingdom, specifically to the reigns of Thutmose III and Amenhotep II."⁵²

In 2016, Petrovich translated the inscription known as "Sinai 361" to read: "Our bound servitude had lingered. At that time, Moses provoked astonishment. *It is* a year of astonishment because of the Lady."⁵³ If that translation is correct, it fits with an enslaved Israelite working the mine during the period of Moses' interaction with Pharaoh, which

⁵⁰ Kennedy (2020), 50. Though Kennedy places it in the reign of Thutmose III, his date of 1450 B.C. fits the reign of Amenhotep II in Petrovich's chronology.

⁵¹ Scott Stripling, "The Fifteenth-Century (Early-Date) Exodus View" in Mark D. Janzen, ed., *The Exodus: Historicity, Chronology, and Theological Implications* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2021), 35.

⁵² Douglas Petrovich, *The World's Oldest Alphabet* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2016), 191.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 169. See his complete discussion of the inscription and translation at 158-172.

provoked astonishment among the Israelites, but prior to the Exodus. "The Lady" to whom he ascribes responsibility for this as yet ineffective year of astonishment is Baalath, the patron deity of Serâbîṭ el-Khâdim. Petrovich states, "Baalath is the feminine form of the divine name, Ba'al. Hathor was the patron deity of the mining site at Serâbîṭ el-Khâdim and was associated with Baalath, possibly because of the importance of each deity's role in sexuality."⁵⁴



L. The Egyptian Royal Citadel at Avaris

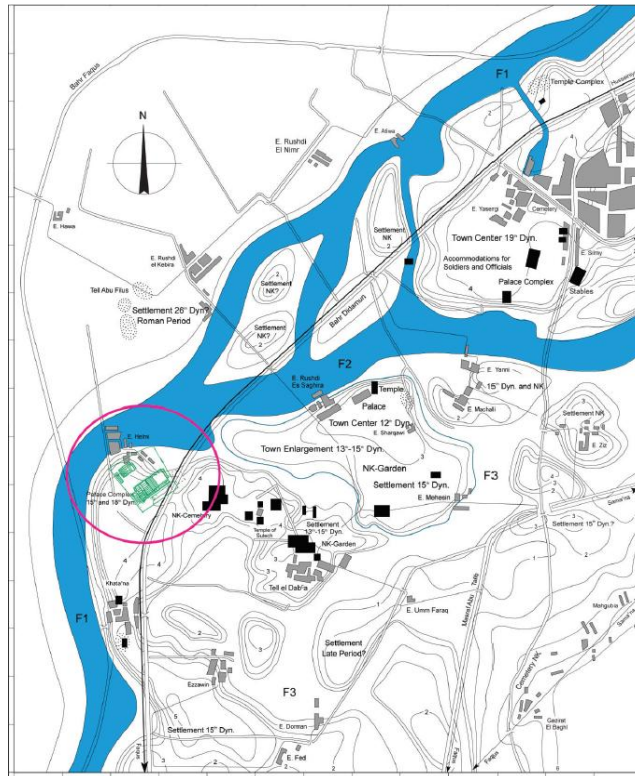
As I mentioned, after Ahmose expelled the Hyksos rulers around 1560, the Egyptians constructed a royal citadel at the Hyksos' capital of Avaris, which is the archaeological site Tell el-Dab'a. Archaeologist Gary Byers remarks, "While the national capital for the 18th Dynasty Pharaohs was in Memphis 13 miles south of Cairo, after the Hyksos experience a royal presence would always have been seen as necessary for national security in the Nile's eastern delta."⁵⁵ At the time of Moses and Amenhotep II, this complex occupied about 13.6 acres and consisted of three palaces (F, G, and J), associated buildings, and a perimeter wall. Palaces F and G were parallel to each other with an artificial lake or large central square between them.⁵⁶ One of these palaces may well be where Moses and Aaron confronted Amenhotep. It was constructed on the easternmost branch of the Nile, and the city served as a major naval stronghold in the time of Thutmose III and Amenhotep II.⁵⁷ The following diagram shows the location of the palace complex in relation to the overall site.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 169.

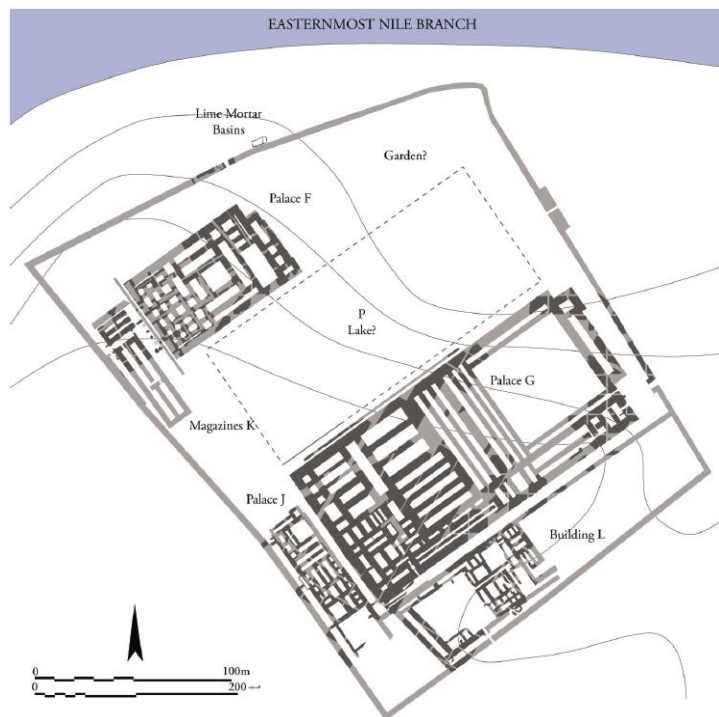
⁵⁵ Gary Byers, "[Israel in Egypt](#)" (Sept. 24, 2008).

⁵⁶ Bryant G. Wood, "[New Discoveries at Rameses](#)" (Oct. 26, 2008).

⁵⁷ Bietak, "Egypt and the Levant" in *The Egyptian World*, 432.



The diagram below shows details of the palace layouts.



Very interestingly, this strategic military center in the eastern Delta was mysteriously abandoned. There is nothing recorded in Egyptian history that explains it. The excavators, Bietak and Forstner-Müller, state (emphasis supplied):

The palace district was probably abandoned after the reign of Amenophis II [=Amenhotep II, 1453–1416 BC]...*The reason for the abandonment of this district, and, presumably, the entire city adjoining the district on the south is an unsolved puzzle at this time. Its solution would be of the greatest importance to historians.* The suggestion that the peaceful foreign policy of the late reign of Amenophis II and Tuthmose IV made this militarily important settlement unnecessary is not convincing. A plague, such as the one documented for Avaris in the late Middle Kingdom, and associated with Avaris in later tradition, appears to be the most likely solution of this problem, although it cannot be proven at this time.⁵⁸

The suddenness of the abandonment is indicated by the fact scores of Aegean arrowheads and pumice used for polishing them covered the floors of the weapons workshops.⁵⁹ This abandonment is all the more intriguing in light of Petrovich's arguments that the abandonment took place *during* the reign of Amenhotep II rather than after. Petrovich writes:

Once the native Egyptians eradicated the foreign invaders who had dominated their landscape for over a century, they quickly moved to rebuild the destroyed city and establish it as a storehouse, eventually to be utilized as a military garrison with weapon-making facilities. Peru-nefer/Avaris became the most vital cog in the unprecedented military campaigning under the reigns of Thutmose III and Amenhotep II. Yet during the height of Egypt's enterprise and glory, her naval base was abandoned mysteriously, and her imperialistic machinery ground to a halt. Egypt suddenly sought to make treaties rather than seize whatever she desired.

Neither the site nor Egyptian annals provides an explicit answer as to why Avaris/Peru-nefer was abandoned. Even years of excavation at the site have not answered this vital question, as Bietak himself states that "[t]he reasons for this are very unclear." . . .

[T]he available evidence indicates that the vacating of the site is understood best to have occurred *during* the reign of Amenhotep II, rather than at the end of his reign or during the reign of Thutmose IV.⁶⁰

Petrovich suggests that the site was mysteriously abandoned because Egypt's army was decimated in the Exodus. He states, "the devastating loss of the Egyptian army during their failure to retrieve the Israelites (Exod 14:28) explains the abandonment of

⁵⁸ Quoted in Wood, "[New Discoveries at Rameses](#)," (Oct. 26, 2008).

⁵⁹ Petrovich (2021), 159.

⁶⁰ Douglas Petrovich, "[Toward Pinpointing the Timing of the Egyptian Abandonment of Avaris During the Middle of the 18th Dynasty](#)," *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 5 (2013), 21-22.

Avaris perfectly. The elimination of the army, clearly headquartered at Avaris, would turn the entire city into a ghost town."⁶¹

M. Change in Egypt's Political and Military Direction

Petrovich calculates that 1446 B.C., the year of the Exodus, was Year 7 of Amenhotep II's reign.⁶² The odd change in Egypt's political and military direction to which Petrovich refers was the sudden curtailment of its aggression and imperialism at the seeming height of its power. Amenhotep II's predecessor, Thutmose III, was a renowned conqueror who led 17 military campaigns into the Levant. According to Petrovich, Amenhotep led only two, the last being a rare November incursion into southern Palestine some 6 months after the Exodus, the timing of which suggests it was in response to some kind of emergency.⁶³

The strangeness of that campaign is further reflected in the fact the forces stayed closer to Egypt than in the prior campaign some four years earlier, the opposite of how successive campaigns normally were conducted, and focused far more on capturing slaves and chariots than did prior campaigns. Indeed, the "booty list" from that campaign includes 101,128 prisoners, 1,082 chariots, and 13,500 weapons. That is 46 times the number of prisoners reported in Amenhotep's first campaign, which is certainly consistent with the need to replenish a recently lost slave force.⁶⁴

Regarding the reversal of foreign policy, Petrovich writes:

Another oddity of A2 [Amenhotep's second campaign] is that after its conclusion, the Egyptian army – established by Thutmose III as the 15th century BC's most elite fighting force – went into virtual hibernation. Their previous policy of unwavering aggressiveness toward Mitanni became one of passivity and the signing of peace treaties. The reason for this new policy is missing from the historical record, but Amenhotep II evidently was the pharaoh who first signed a treaty with Mitanni, subsequent to A2. Redford connects this event to "the arrival (after year 10, we may be sure) of a Mitannian embassy sent by [Mitanni's King] Saussatar with proposals of 'brotherhood' (i.e., a fraternal alliance and renunciation of hostilities)." Redford adds that "Amenophis II seemed susceptible to negotiations," and that he "was apparently charmed and disarmed by the embassy from 'Naharin,' and perhaps even signed a treaty." Yet such a treaty is completely out of character for imperial Egypt

⁶¹ Petrovich (2021), 164.

⁶² Ibid., 166. He previously placed the beginning of Amenhotep II's reign at 1455, which meant 1446, the year of the Exodus, was Year 9 of his reign. He became convinced several years ago, based on a possible understanding of a restored inscription on the Memphis Stele, that Amenhotep II's reign began in 1453, which puts 1446 in Year 7 of his reign. See, Petrovich (2021), 159-164.

⁶³ See, Petrovich, "[Amenhotep II and the Historicity of the Exodus Pharaoh](#)" (Feb. 4, 2010); Petrovich (2013); Petrovich (2021), 159-161.

⁶⁴ Petrovich (2010); Petrovich (2021), 161-162.

and this prideful monarch, especially since "the pharaonic state of the Eighteenth Dynasty could, more easily than Mitanni, sustain the expense of periodic military incursions 800 km into Asia." Support for Amenhotep II being the first to sign a pact with Mitanni is found in the actions of Thutmose IV: "Only by postulating a change of reign can we explain a situation in which the new pharaoh, Thutmose IV, can feel free to attack Mitannian holdings with impunity." Why would Amenhotep II do the unthinkable, and opt to make a treaty with Mitanni?

This mysterious reversal in foreign policy would remain unexplainable and unthinkable if not for the possibility of a single, cataclysmic event. If the Egyptians lost virtually their entire army in the springtime disaster at the Red Sea in Year [7], a desperate reconnaissance campaign designed to "save face" with the rest of the ancient world and to replenish their Israelite slave-base would be paramount. Certainly the Egyptians would have needed time to rally their remaining forces together, however small and/or in shambles their army may have been, and it would explain a November campaign that was nothing more than a slave-raid into Palestine as a show of force. The Egyptians could not afford to live through the winter without the production that was provided by the Hebrew workforce, and they could not allow Mitanni or any other ancient power to consider using the winter to plan an attack on Egyptian territories, which would seem vulnerable.⁶⁵

In addition, the "booty list" from Amenhotep II's second campaign refers to other foreign rulers having heard of his great victories. Petrovich comments, "This reference to the effect of a military campaign upon kings of distant nations, all of whom ruled empires in their own right, is unique among contemporary Egyptian booty lists and annals." This concern over how other kings viewed his Year-7 conquests may be the result of his needing a victorious campaign after the Exodus defeat to ward off suspicions that Egypt was no longer able to wage war.⁶⁶

N. Desecration of Hatshepsut's Image

Another intriguing bit of evidence supportive of the claim Amenhotep II was the Pharaoh of the Exodus is his subsequent desecration of Hatshepsut's image. At some point after her death, a concerted effort was made to remove her from Egyptian history. Petrovich writes:

Many inscribed cartouches of her were erased, while her busts were smashed or broken into pieces, perhaps by gangs of workmen dispatched to various sites throughout Egypt. In some cases, the culprits carefully and completely hacked out the silhouette of her image from carvings, often leaving a distinct, Hatshepsut-shaped lacuna in the middle of a scene,

⁶⁵ Petrovich (2010).

⁶⁶ Ibid.

often as a preliminary step to replacing it with a different image or royal cartouche, usually that of Thutmose I or II. At Karnak, her obelisks were walled-up and incorporated into the vestibule in front of Pylon V, while at Djoser-Djeseru her statues and sphinxes were removed, smashed, and cast into trash dumps.⁶⁷

Though many Egyptologists believe this campaign was waged by Thutmose III out of an alleged sense of sexist shame for having shared the throne with a female ruler, there are serious objections to that theory. It is inconsistent with how he otherwise treated Hatshepsut's memory, it was done too long after she was gone, at least twenty years, for that motive to make sense, and it does not explain why attacks also were made against Senenmut, her chief advisor, who was a man. A much better candidate for this attack is Amenhotep II. If Hatshepsut had raised Moses as her own son, the humiliating and devastating defeat at the Red Sea would have left Amenhotep seething with rage against her, the kind of rage that would explain wanting to extinguish her existence in the afterlife, which was the effect that expunging one from the society's memory was believed to have.⁶⁸

III. From Egypt to the Promise Land (1446 – 1406 B.C.)

A. Unlikelihood of Physical Remains of the Wandering

The people of Israel were nomadic and lived in tents during the Exodus and the forty years of wandering in the wilderness (e.g., Ex. 16:16; Num. 1:52, 9:17-23, 16:27, 24:2, 5; Deut. 1:27, 33, 5:30, 11:6). They would have had minimal belongings and, for the most part, used skins rather than ceramic vessels to transport liquids. Archaeologist James Hoffmeier rightly notes that one "would not expect nomadic peoples who only occupy a particular spot for a short period of time to leave tangible evidence of their presence."⁶⁹ For example, we know from Egyptian annals and a stela⁷⁰ that the pre-Exodus Pharaoh Thutmose III (Amenhotep II's predecessor) laid siege to Megiddo for seven months. Hoffmeier states: "Even given the prolonged period of the Egyptian siege at Megiddo, with thousands of soldiers and hundreds of horses from the chariots present, no archaeological evidence of this camp has been discovered, despite a century of excavations and explorations at Megiddo."⁷¹ He concludes, "So it is not surprising that no clear archaeological evidence for Israelites in Sinai has been found. To expect otherwise is unrealistic."⁷²

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid; Petrovich (2021), 192-195.

⁶⁹ James K. Hoffmeier, *Ancient Israel in Sinai* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 150.

⁷⁰ A stela (stee-luh), also called a stele (stee-lee), is an ancient, upright stone slab with markings.

⁷¹ Hoffmeier (2005), 151-152.

⁷² Ibid., 153.

Related to this, a number of scholars claim that certain of Moses' statements about the size of the Israelite population at the time of the Exodus have been misunderstood to mean that Israel was far larger than he intended to communicate. The arguments in that regard commonly involve the meaning of *'elep* (usually rendered "thousand") or whether there was some kind of understood convention of exaggeration when describing the victories of a great king in the Ancient Near East. All of the proposed theories have difficulties, and none has gained general acceptance. For more on this, see J. W. Wenham, "[Large Numbers in the Old Testament](#)," *Tyndale Bulletin* 18 (1967): 19-53; David M. Fouts, "[A Defense of the Hyperbolic Interpretation of Large Numbers in the Old Testament](#)," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40 (1997), 377-387; Colin J. Humphreys, "[How Many People Were in the Exodus from Egypt?](#)" *Science and Christian Belief* 12 (2000), 17-34; David Fouts, "The Incredible Numbers of the Hebrew Kings" in David M. Howard, Jr. and Michael A. Grisanti, eds., *Giving the Sense: Understanding and Using Old Testament Historical Texts* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003), 283-299; David Fouts, "Numbers, Large Numbers" in Bill T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson, eds., *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 753; James K. Hoffmeier, *Ancient Israel in Sinai* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 155-159; Ronald B. Allen, "Numbers" in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 2:53-69 (esp. 65-69); Got Questions, [How many Israelites left Egypt in the exodus?](#)

B. Soleb Inscription

Around 1400 B.C. Pharaoh Amenhotep III built a temple in Soleb (in the current nation of Sudan) that was dedicated to the god Amon-re. The inscribed topographical list at the temple refers to "the Land of the Shasu of Yahweh" (reconstruction below).



"The term Shasu is almost exclusively used in New Kingdom texts for semi-nomadic peoples living in parts of Lebanon, Syria, Sinai, Canaan, and Transjordan."⁷³ So here is an Egyptian reference some 50 years after the Exodus to a semi-nomadic people

⁷³ Charles Aling and Clyde Billington, "[The Name Yahweh in Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts](#)" (Mar. 8, 2010).

associated with the Levant who were devoted to Yahweh, the God of the Israelites.⁷⁴ That certainly suggests an Egyptian familiarity with Israel and its God at a very early date, a familiarity that is consistent with the events of the Exodus. Aling and Billington conclude:

Although we do not have all the information that we wish we did, it is significant that there are no mentions of the Shasu of Yahweh in Egyptian texts earlier than the reign of Amenhotep III. If the group in question were Yahweh followers who never went to Egypt, why are they absent in topographical lists from the early period of the 18th Dynasty, for example, from the extensive topographical lists of Thutmosis III? The reason may very well be because the Shasu of Yahweh were indeed the Israelites and that they were still living in Egypt in the early 18th Dynasty. . . .

It thus appears very likely that the Shasu of Yahweh, who are mentioned in the topographical texts at Soleb and Amarah-West, were the Israelites who by about 1400 BC had settled into their own land (*t3*) in the mountains of Canaan. It also appears that for the ancient Egyptians the one feature that distinguished the Israelites from all the other Shasu (Semitic herders) in this area was their worship of the God Yahweh.⁷⁵

C. Berlin Statue Pedestal Relief 21687

It also seems likely that the name "Israel" was used in an Egyptian inscription known as the Berlin Statue Pedestal Relief 21687. This item was acquired in 1913 by Ludwig Borchardt from a merchant named M. Nachman and currently is in the Egyptian Museum in Berlin. Stripling states: "Three name rings appear on Statue Pedestal Relief 21687. From left to right (in English), they read as follows: Ashkelon, Canaan, and Israel. Unfortunately, because the granite slab broke, the final third of the Israel name ring is missing on the right edge of the relief."⁷⁶

In 2001, Manfred Görg published a new reading of the damaged place name suggesting it was an archaic form of "Israel." Görg's proposed reading was disputed by James Hoffmeier, but in 2010 Gorg, joined by Peter van der Veen of the University of Mainz and Christoffer Theis of the University of Heidelberg, published a scholarly defense of the reading with additional supporting evidence.⁷⁷ In 2017, Wolfgang Zwickel

⁷⁴ It is possible the phrase should be understood as "the land of the nomads who live in the area of Yahweh" instead of "the land of the nomads who worship the God Yahweh," but in that case certainly "the area of Yahweh" was named after the God of the Israelites. And note that no town or geographical area bearing the name Yahweh has been discovered.

⁷⁵ Aling and Billington (2010); see also, Kennedy (2020), 60-61.

⁷⁶ Stripling (2021), 39-40.

⁷⁷ Peter van der Veen, Christoffer Theis, and Manfred Görg, "Israel in Canaan (Long) Before Pharaoh Merenptah? A Fresh Look at Berlin Statue Pedestal Relief 21687," *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 2 (2010), 15-25; see also, Bryant G. Wood, "[New Evidence Supporting the Early \(Biblical\) Date of the Exodus and Conquest](#)" (Nov. 11, 2011).

and Pieter van der Veen stated in a journal article that "an increasing number of scholars now tend to accept this reading."⁷⁸

The inscription itself dates to the reign of Ramesses II in the Nineteenth Dynasty (13th century), but based on the spellings of the names it is believed to have been copied from an earlier inscription from around 1400. Stripling comments: "The names and their proximity to one another is significant because of a similar arrangement on the Merenptah Stela, which also mentions Israel. If Görg's reading withstands scrutiny, then the Berlin Pedestal provides strong evidence for Israel in Canaan in the Eighteenth Dynasty, likely in the fourteenth century."⁷⁹ That would make this the oldest express reference to Israel by a couple of centuries, a date that fits with an Exodus under Amenhotep II.



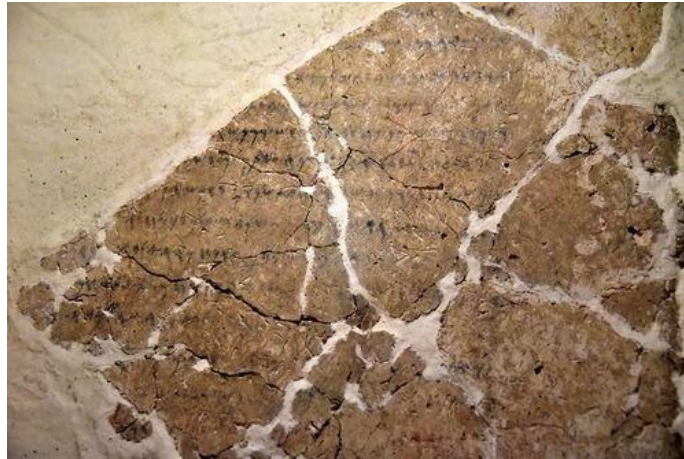
D. Balaam Inscription

During their time of wandering in the wilderness, Israel defeated kings Sihon and Og in Numbers 21. As a result, they controlled a tract of land east of the Jordan River about 150 miles long. That prompted Balak, king of Moab, the land to the south of that now controlled by Israel, to hire Balaam son of Beor to put a curse on Israel (Num. 22:1-7). Balaam was unwilling or unable to speak falsely in God's name and wound-up blessing Israel rather than cursing her. But he thereafter succumbed to the temptation to harm Israel by advising the Moabites to use their women to pull the Israelites into idolatry, specifically the worship of Baal of Peor (Num. 25:1-9; 31:15-16; 2 Pet. 2:15; Rev. 2:14).

⁷⁸ Wolfgang Zwickel and Pieter van der Veen, "The Earliest Reference to Israel and Its Possible Archaeological and Historical Background," *Vetus Testamentum* 67 (2017), 130.

⁷⁹ Stripling (2021), 40.

In 1967 an inscription on a plaster wall dating from the 9th century BC was discovered at Deir Alla, Jordan, which is probably the site of ancient Succoth. It was a poetic text written in Aramaic that told a story from centuries earlier. The plaster was pieced back together from over a hundred fragments.



Kennedy comments:

The story relates how a man named Balaam, son of Beor, described as a seer or prophet, received a divine message at night from the gods, and specifically from the god El, that darkness and chaos would be coming on the land due to the work of hostile divinities. In this narrative, Balaam went through various religious rituals in an attempt to appease the gods. This section is followed by mention of the underworld. Then, the people apparently rejected, condemned, and banned Balaam and his message, but the text is unclear because of its fragmentary condition.

However, the careful and artistic composition of this text on the wall of a building indicates the importance of the story of Balaam the seer. . . .

The existence of the Balaam Inscription demonstrates that in ancient times Balaam, son of Beor, was known as a famous seer in the area on the east side of the Jordan River where the events recorded in the book of Numbers took place.⁸⁰

The sum of the matter is that those who reject the historicity of Scripture's account of Israel, Egypt, and the Exodus are being unreasonably skeptical. They are demanding a kind or quantum of evidence that is unrealistic given the limitations of archaeological investigation of ancient Egypt. When those defenses are lowered, one's eyes are opened to Scripture's consistency with the historical data. One can appreciate the fact there was a significant population from the land of Jacob's family in the precise area described in Scripture at the precise time they are said to have been there. One can see that Pithom and Rameses were indeed storage cities as stated in Scripture, one can see the

⁸⁰ Titus Kennedy, *Unearthing the Bible* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2020), 65.

meshing of many biblical details with the chronology of Egyptian rulers, and one can see the significant circumstantial evidence pointing to some kind of transformative event in Egypt during the reign of Amenhotep II. It seems that until that Day there will always be room to defend one's unbelief; absolute certainty is beyond historical inquiry. But there likewise will be room for an intellectually satisfying faith, as the evidence from ancient Egypt demonstrates.

IV. Conquest and the Judges (1406 – 1051 B.C.)

A. Jericho

According to Scripture, in the spring of 1406 B.C., when the Israelites were still camped east of the Jordan River across from the fortified city of Jericho, Joshua sent two spies to Jericho. They were hidden from the king's men by the prostitute Rahab, whose house was built into the city wall, and sent on their way by her, and the spies promised to spare her and her family (Josh. 2:1-22). The Israelites then crossed the Jordan through a miracle of God, and in Joshua 6 they conquered Jericho through another miracle. Specifically, after marching around Jericho once a day for six days and seven times on the seventh day, the priests gave a long blast on the trumpets, all the people shouted, and the city wall fell "beneath it" or "beneath itself" (literal translation of 6:5, 20). The Israelites then went "up" (6:5, 20) into the city, destroyed it, burned it (6:24), and with the exception of Achan, did not plunder it (take any of the "devoted things" for themselves, though silver, gold, and vessels of bronze and iron were put into the treasury of the house of the Lord).

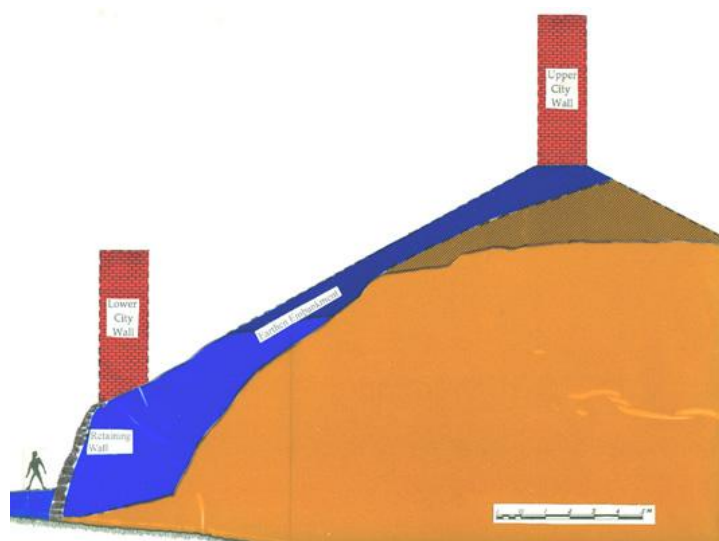


Ancient Jericho, which was smaller than in NT times, is the archaeological site known as Tell es-Sultan. The above view is from the north. The site has been excavated a number of times since the early 20th century. The German team led by Ernst Sellin and Carl Watzinger worked there in 1907-1909; John Garstang excavated there in the 1930s; Kathleen Kenyon excavated there in the 1950s; and an Italian team headed by Lorenzo Nigro has been working there since the late 1990s. Here is a diagram of the locations of their various digs.



Blue = Sellin/Watzinger Green = Garstang Yellow = Kenyon Red = Nigro

The fortifications of the ancient city were formidable indeed. There was a stone retaining wall around the base of the mound that was about 15 feet high, on top of which was a mudbrick wall that was six feet thick and about 20 feet high. An earthen embankment led from that lower mudbrick wall to another mudbrick wall of similar size that surrounded the inner city. There were some simple houses built on the slope between the two mudbrick walls, in what appears to be a kind of "low-rent district," perhaps an overflow from the inner city.



Here are two photographs showing the stone retainer wall at different locations.



In his excavations at the eastern-central area of the site, Garstang found clear evidence of destruction and burning of the city. Based on pottery finds, he dated the destruction to around 1400 B.C. He wrote:

In a word, in all material details and in date the fall of Jericho took place as described in the Biblical narrative. Our demonstration is limited, however, to material observations: the walls fell, shaken apparently by earthquake, and the city was destroyed by fire, about 1400 B.C. These are the basic facts resulting from our investigations. The link with Joshua and the Israelites is only circumstantial but it seems to be solid and without a flaw.⁸¹

His conclusions were controversial, and in the 1950s, at his request, another British archaeologist named Kathleen Kenyon conducted further excavations. In her excavation just north of where Garstang found the destruction level, she confirmed that the city had been thoroughly destroyed by fire and found many jars filled with burned grain, which fits with the swiftness of Joshua's conquest, the fact it was in the spring, and the fact the Israelites took no plunder (left the valuable grain). She concluded, however, as had an earlier archaeologist, that the destruction occurred around 1550 B.C., meaning there was no city for Joshua to conquer in 1406 B.C. That is still the opinion of most archaeologists, but it has been forcefully challenged. Here are some photos of the grain jugs.

⁸¹ John Garstang, "Jericho and the Biblical Story," in *Wonders of the Past*, ed. J. A. Hammerton (New York: Wise, 1937), 1222.



In an article in *Biblical Archaeology Review* in 1990, archaeologist Bryant Wood, an expert in Canaanite pottery of the 15th century B.C., criticized Kenyon's dating analysis and found that four lines of evidence (ceramic data, stratigraphical considerations, scarab evidence, and radiocarbon dating [no longer supportive]) support Garstang's dating over Kenyon's.⁸² He stated:

When the evidence is critically examined there is no basis for [Kenyon's] contention that City IV was destroyed by the Hyksos or Egyptians in the mid-16th century B.C.E. The pottery, stratigraphic considerations, scarab data and a Carbon-14 date all point to a destruction of the city around the end of Late Bronze I, about 1400 B.C.E. Garstang's original date for this event appears to be the correct one!

Scarabs are small Egyptian amulets (good luck charms) shaped like a beetle. According to Kenyon, Jericho was not occupied from about 1550 B.C. until well after Joshua's alleged conquest in 1406 B.C., but Garstang found that people in the Jericho cemetery just to the northwest had been buried with scarabs bearing the names of several pharaohs who reigned throughout the 15th century. One scarab bore Hatshepsut's name (ca. 1504-1483 B.C.), one bore the name of Thutmose III (ca. 1504-1450 B.C.), and two bore the name of Amenhotep III (ca. 1407-1370 B.C.). There was also a seal of Thutmose III.⁸³ No scarabs or seals of any later pharaohs were found.⁸⁴

How could the people of Jericho be buried with scarabs of pharaohs who ruled *during* the 15th century if, as Kenyon claimed, the city was uninhabited throughout the 15th century? Her response was that they were buried much later than the 15th century and that all the scarabs were commemorative, meaning they were made long after the various

⁸² See Bryant G. Wood, "[Did the Israelites Conquer Jericho? A New Look at the Archaeological Evidence](#)" (May 1, 2008).

⁸³ Dates for the reigns are from Petrovich (2021), 214.

⁸⁴ Kennedy (2023), 211.

Pharaohs had died. It strains credulity to claim that all the scarabs and the seal were commemorative, all the more when one recalls that Hatshepsut had been thoroughly demonized. As Stripling observes, "No one would ever want a replica of her scarab."⁸⁵ In addition, Kennedy says, "the scarabs of Amenhotep III were not produced after his reign."⁸⁶ So Kenyon's explanation does not work.

Regarding C-14 dating, the original date of around 1400 was found to be in error and corrected to a range of 1700 to 1417 B.C. Subsequent tests on six grain samples from the destruction level yielded dates between 1640 and 1520 B.C., and tests on 12 charcoal samples from the destruction level resulted in dates between 1690 and 1610 B.C. Tests on two samples submitted by the Italian team yielded dates between 1437 and 1262 B.C. and between 1688 and 1506 B.C.⁸⁷ So most of the dates are significantly older than 1400.

This is not dispositive however because C-14 dates from this time period in the Near East routinely are a century or two older than what are considered solid archaeological dates. It is as if a layer of volcanic ash above (and therefore younger than) a Corvette Stingray was dated to 1900 (which would make the Stingray older than 1900). That would be a clue something was amiss, and that is what archaeologists working in this region think about certain C-14 dates, including Manfred Bietak at Tell el-Dab'a. It seems there is a problem with the calibration necessary to convert radiocarbon years into calendar years (calibration being necessary because C14/C12 ratio in the atmosphere is not constant). This is a very hot topic of debate. Indeed, on November 18, 2015, Rodger C. Young presented a paper at the annual meeting of the Near East Archaeological Society titled "[Anomalies in Radiocarbon vs. Archaeological Dating Are Not the Invention of Biblical Archaeologists](#)."

Wood wrote in 2008 (see fn. 10, emphasis supplied):

My dating of the destruction of Jericho to ca. 1400 B.C. is based on pottery, which, in turn, is based on Egyptian chronology. Jericho is just one example of the discrepancy between historical and C14 dates for the second millennium B.C. C14 dates are consistently 100–150 years earlier than historical dates. There is a heated debate going on among scholars concerning this, especially with regard to the date of the eruption of Thera (Santorini). . . . Because of the inconsistencies and uncertainties of C14 dating, *most archaeologists prefer historical dates over C14 dates*.

Kennedy likewise states, "Because of the inconsistency throughout most of these samples, and that radiocarbon dates for Bronze Age sites in Levant often conflict with the chronological information derived from ceramics and inscriptions, the radiocarbon dates should be viewed with caution, and dating strata by means of pottery typology continues to be the most reliable method."⁸⁸ Stripling states:

⁸⁵ Stripling (2021), 42.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 212.

⁸⁷ See Bryant G. Wood, "[Carbon 14 Dating at Jericho](#)" (Aug. 7, 2008).

⁸⁸ Kennedy (2023), 213.

The carbon 14 data also play an important role in the dating of Jericho's destruction. In 1995 Bruins and Plicht reported that carbon 14 tests of grain samples found at Jericho yielded extremely early dates (1601-1566 BC and 1561-1524 BC) at a confidence level of 68 percent. These samples came from the same jars that demonstrated the city fell in the early spring. The radiocarbon results loosely matched Kenyon's destruction estimate of 1580 BC, and many scholars hold them as decisive in dating City IV's destruction. But Bietak's findings, buttressed by the recent and careful argumentation of Daphna Ben-Tor, neutralize the strength of this argument. Jericho's carbon 14 dates are too early by far more than one century. Bietak, one of the most respected archaeologists of his generation, affirms that carbon 14 dates from the Eighteenth Dynasty need to be downdated by 170 years. . . . Furthermore, carbon 14 dates always vary plus or minus 50 years, so the carbon 14 dates of Bruins and Plicht, properly calibrated, synchronize with the early date.⁸⁹

Wood's analysis in the 1990 *BAR* article was challenged in a subsequent issue of the journal by archaeologist Piotr Bienkowski, which prompted a detailed response from Wood titled "Dating Jericho's Destruction: Bienkowski Is Wrong on All Counts." The flavor of that response is captured by the title and the following quotes from near the beginning and end of that article.

Bienkowski's attempt to explain away the evidence for lowering the date of the destruction of Jericho is misguided and void of substance. Assertions made without data to back them up are unconvincing. His discussion is superficial, at best, lacking both depth and precision. . . . A review of the evidence relevant to the date of the destruction of Jericho reveals that Bienkowski's objections do not stand up to critical assessment. . . . Unless Bienkowski is prepared to rewrite the archaeological history of Palestine, he is going to have to accept the fact that Jericho was destroyed early in the Late Bronze Age, in about 1400 B.C.E.

In addition to Wood's confirmation of Garstang's date for the destruction level at Tell es-Sultan, there are other pieces of evidence that tie that destruction to the Israelite assault recorded in Joshua. Wood writes:

Was this destruction at the hands of the Israelites? The correlation between the archaeological evidence and the Biblical narrative is substantial:

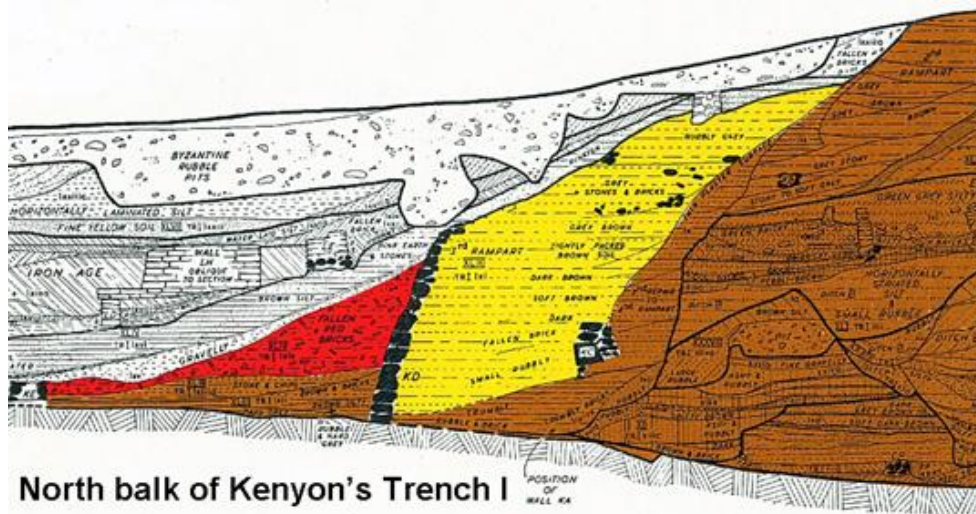
- The city was strongly fortified (Joshua 2:5,7,15, 6:5,20).
- The attack occurred just after harvest time in the spring (Joshua 2:6, 3:15, 5:10).
- The inhabitants had no opportunity to flee with their foodstuffs (Joshua

⁸⁹ Stripling (2021), 42-43.

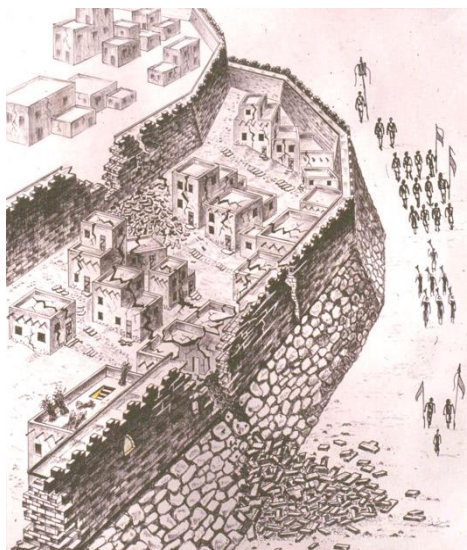
6:1).

- The siege was short (Joshua 6:15).
- The walls were leveled, possibly by an earthquake (Joshua 6:20).
- The city was not plundered (Joshua 6:17-18).
- The city was burned (Joshua 6:20).

Regarding the walls, remember the fortification system involved a mudbrick wall built on top of the retaining wall that surrounded the base of the mound and another mudbrick wall higher up the earthen embankment that surrounded the inner city. This diagram of the north face of Kenyon's west trench shows a huge pile of "Fallen Red Bricks" forming a ramp to the top of the retaining wall.



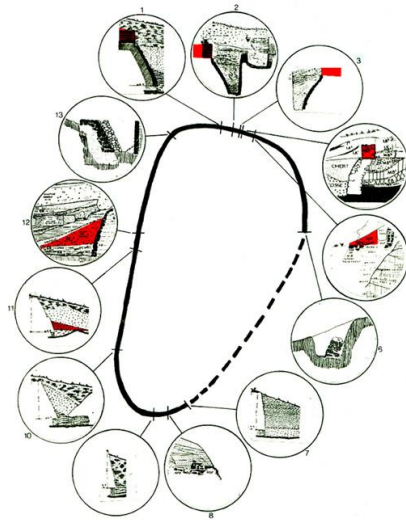
She says she found "fallen red bricks piling nearly to the top of the revetment," adding, "These probably came from the wall on the summit of the bank [and/or]...the brickwork above the revetment." The following drawing illustrates how God may have thrown down the walls.



Most English translations render the clause in Josh. 6:5, 20 as "the city wall will fall/fell *flat*," but the text literally says the city wall will fall/fell below/beneath it or below/beneath itself. So it could mean either the wall collapsed in its place, where it stood, or that the wall fell so as to end up below the city or below where it formerly stood. The phrase "and the people shall go up" suggests they would need to climb to a higher location after the wall fell, which we now know the topography of the city made necessary.

The mudbrick wall that was atop the retaining wall survived only in the northern section of the city, so the wall in that location apparently did not fall. Here is Wodd's caption to the following diagram:

At the north end (numbers 1–5), a portion of the mud brick wall (red) atop the stone retaining wall survived, demonstrating that the city wall did not fall in this area. Nothing remains of the mud brick city wall at other points investigated, showing that it had collapsed everywhere else (numbers 6–13). Remnants of the collapsed city wall (red) were actually found still in place in three places at Jericho: number 11 (German excavation), number 12 (Kenyon's excavation), and the 1997 Italian-Palestinian excavation extending Kenyon's south trench at number 8.



Here is a photograph by Sellin and Watzinger showing the northern retaining wall with remnants of the mudbrick wall on top and some houses that were built into it.



Perhaps this section was spared whatever force God used to bring down the walls (earthquake?) so as to protect Rahab and her family who were awaiting rescue by the Israelites. After all, her house was built into the city wall (Josh. 2:15). Moreover, she urged the Israelite spies to flee to the hills in order to hide there, and the hills are just to the north of Jericho. So if her house was in the north wall they could head straight there.

B. Ai

We are told in Joshua 8 that Israel, after conquering Jericho, conquered and burned Ai to the west. This was after an unsuccessful attack reported in Joshua 7, which failure resulted from Achan having taken at Jericho some of the devoted things for himself.

Joshua 7:2 says Ai was near Beth-aven and east of Bethel. Since the 19th century, Ai was identified with the site et-Tell, but excavations at that site, most recently by Joseph Callaway in the 1960s, indicate it was not occupied at the time of Joshua. That has led a number of scholars to conclude the biblical account is not historically credible. Indeed, Callaway stated, "Ai is simply an embarrassment to every view of the conquest that takes the biblical and archaeological evidence seriously."

Bryant Wood has made a strong and detailed case that et-Tell has been misidentified as Ai, showing that it does not match what is said about Ai in Joshua 7 and 8.⁹⁰ A much better candidate for Ai is Khirbet el-Maqatir, about 0.6 miles west of et-Tell. It not only fits the geographical requirements of Scripture but, as Wood has shown through some 13 years of excavation (1995-2000, 2009-2017), also fits other aspects of Joshua's Ai. For example, it was fortified at the time of the conquest (implied by fact it was gated, Josh. 7:5, 8:29), it had a gate on the north side (as implied by Josh. 8:11), it

⁹⁰ Joel Kramer in ['The Problem' of Joshuas' Ai . . . Solved!](#) (2025) argues that et-Tell is indeed the correct site and that Callaway, like Kenyon at Jericho, misinterpreted the evidence of occupation.

was smaller than Gibeon (Josh. 7:3, 10:2), and it was destroyed by fire around 1400 B.C. Here is the location of Khirbet el-Maqatir. It was really more like a small Canaanite fortress than a typical city or town.



Bryan Windle concludes his 2019 article on Khirbet el-Maqatir this way:

In the absence of any ancient inscription identifying a site, scholars are left to match the archaeological remains with what is known about a place from history. In the case of Ai, the only ancient text with information about the site is the Bible and Khirbet el-Maqatir is the only site that meets all of the biblical criteria. It has the right stuff in the right place at the right time. Rather than being an "embarrassment," correctly identifying Khirbet el-Maqatir as the site of the city of Ai that Joshua defeated demonstrates the historical reliability of the biblical account of the conquest in the 15th century B.C.⁹¹

Note that Joshua's Ai probably was not the Ai referred to in connection with Abraham in Gen. 12:8 and 13:3. Ai means "ruin" in Hebrew, and the site of et-Tell was a ruin long before Abraham entered Canaan (and would not be inhabited for about a thousand years). So Abraham's Ai may have been et-Tell, whereas Joshua's Ai was very likely Khirbet el-Maqatir. It would not be unheard of for a new settlement to adopt (or be given) the name of its defunct neighbor, especially given their proximity. As Wood quips, "There was a left Ai and a right Ai."

C. Hazor

With Israel in control of central and southern Canaan, we are told in Josh. 11:1-15 that Jabin king of Hazor, the largest city of the northern region, brought a number of kings together into a military alliance. This huge army, with many horses and chariots,

⁹¹ Bryan Windle, "[The Lost City of Ai...Found](#)" (April 12, 2019).

assembled near the waters of Merom to await Israel's anticipated advance. Joshua attacked them suddenly, and God gave him the victory. The Israelites pursued them as far as Sidon to the northwest and the Valley of Mizpah to the northeast. They then turned back and captured Hazor, which is described in Josh. 11:10 as "the head" of all the kingdoms of northern Canaan. They killed the king and all who were in the city and then burned it (Josh. 11:10-13).

The average city in Palestine at this time covered about 15-20 acres, whereas Hazor (Tell el-Qedah) had an acropolis or upper city of about 30 acres (12 hectares) and a lower city of about 170 acres (70 hectares). This confirms its description as the leading city of the area. Yigael Yadin excavated Hazor from 1955-1958 and again in 1968. Excavations resumed in 1990 under the direction of Amnon Ben-Tor.



According to ancient Egyptian texts, Thutmose III, Amenhotep II, and possibly Seti I conquered Hazor during their reigns. The attacks by Thutmose and Amenhotep would have been prior to 1440 B.C., and if Seti conquered Hazor – his listing may refer to another city – it would have been just before 1290 B.C.⁹² Excavations revealed that Hazor was destroyed by fire in the Late Bronze Age I, which is 1500-1400 B.C., and this destruction is best attributed to Israel's attack under Joshua. Kennedy states:

Although excavators often attributed this Late Bronze IB, 15th-century BC destruction to Thutmose III, this first fiery destruction of Hazor in the Late Bronze Age appears to have come just before 1400 BC, after the reign of Thutmose IV and during the reign of Amenhotep III. This is based on evidence of continuous habitation of Hazor until the end of the 15th century BC.

Important chronological markers indicating that the city continued to be occupied through most of the 15th century BC and was destroyed

⁹² Kennedy (2023), 197-198.

near 1400 BC include the discovery of an Egyptian royal scarab of Pharaoh Thutmose IV in Area F and a scarab of Amenhotep III in a destruction layer from the lower city. Beyond the desecration of statues, other details unearthed in excavations suggest identifying the destroyers as Israelites.⁹³

One of these additional details identifying the destroyers as Israelites is that the attackers burned storage jars that were full of grain instead of taking them as spoils of war. That points to Israelites because Scripture reports that they were prohibited by God from taking goods for themselves. The city was to be dedicated to destruction. Kennedy states: "A widespread destruction by fire at the city, destruction of temples, possible desecration of cult statues, and a period of abandonment following the attack all suggest that the Israelites destroyed Hazor around 1400 BC, after which it was rebuilt and then destroyed yet again by the Israelites around 1230 BC."⁹⁴

The conquest of Hazor by Israelites around 1230 B.C. is implied in Judg. 4:24, which would correspond with the second burn layer found in excavations.⁹⁵ The Jabin who was king of Hazor at that time certainly was not the Jabin of Josh. 11:1 because he was killed by Joshua (11:10). Rather, he was a later king who took the royal dynastic title "Jabin" (something like Pharaoh).

D. Merenptah Stela

Merenptah (commonly known as Merneptah), the son of Rameses II, was Pharaoh in Egypt from about 1223-1213 B.C.⁹⁶ He documented his campaigns against Libya and Canaan on a ten-foot-tall stela and then had it erected at his funerary temple in Thebes (modern Luxor), Egypt, where it was discovered in 1896 by archaeologist Flinders Petrie.

Merneptah's campaign into Canaan was around 1218 B.C. Kennedy notes:

Joshua probably died around 1370 B.C., at which point the Israelites still had to defeat Canaanites and begin to settle more of the land, eventually becoming the most populous and dominant group, but this took time, as the book of Judges records. Merneptah arrived in Canaan about 150 years later, about the time Deborah and Barak, when Israelites had cities and towns throughout the land.⁹⁷

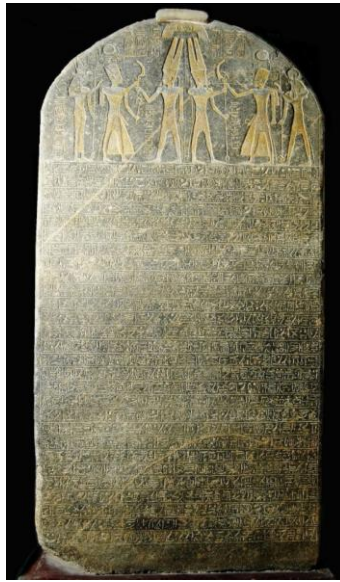
⁹³ Kennedy (2023), 200.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 201. See also, Douglas Petrovich, "[The Dating of Hazor's Destruction in Joshua 11 Via Biblical, Archaeological, and Epigraphical Evidence](#)," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 51.3 (Sept. 2008), 499-502.

⁹⁵ Stripling (2021), 45-46, wonders if the second burn layer should be attributed to Merenptah.

⁹⁶ See Petrovich, "[A Chronology of Egyptian Dynasties 12, 18, 19, and 20](#)" (updated 3/26/21).

⁹⁷ Kennedy (2020), 74 (fn. 37).



Kennedy says of the stela and its significance:

On the top of the stele, Merneptah is seen with the Egyptian gods Amun, Mut, and Khonsu. . . . A portion of the text translates as: "Canaan has been plundered into every sort of woe. Ashkelon has been overcome. Gezer has been captured. Yano'am is made nonexistent. Israel is laid waste and its seed (grain) is not."

The record on the stele was fashioned to begin with a region, noting three cities that were situated in the south, central, and north, and to end with a people that inhabited the land. The Israel section of the inscription spells out the name Israel with Egyptian hieroglyphics, then is followed by a symbol signifying that the word refers to a group of people, not a location.

The reference to Israel as the only people mentioned in the region demonstrates that the Israelites were the dominant group in Canaan in the late 13th century BC, and it indicates that they had been present in the region for a significant amount of time prior to the campaign of Merneptah. If the Israelites began to settle Canaan after 1400 BC as the books of Joshua and Judges describe, then by the time of Merneptah they would have been the main occupants of the land rather than the Canaanites, just as the stele indicates.⁹⁸

Up until the publication in 2001 of Manfred Görg's reading of the inscription on the Berlin Statue Pedestal Relief 21687, which is traceable to around 1400 B.C., this was the only direct reference to Israel in Egyptian records and the only reference to Israel outside the Bible prior to 931/930 B.C., the time of the divided kingdom. The boasting on Merneptah's behalf certainly is not to be taken literally. Indeed, many scholars doubt that

⁹⁸ Ibid., 74-75.

Merneptah even came into contact with Israel. But whatever the extent of this campaign in Canaan, God chose not to mention it in Scripture.

E. Altar on Mount Ebal

The ancient city of Shechem, the archaeological site known as Tell Balata, is about 30 miles north of Jerusalem in the narrow east-west valley at the base of Mount Gerizim to the south (left) and Mount Ebal to the north (right). It is now engulfed by the modern city of Nablus.

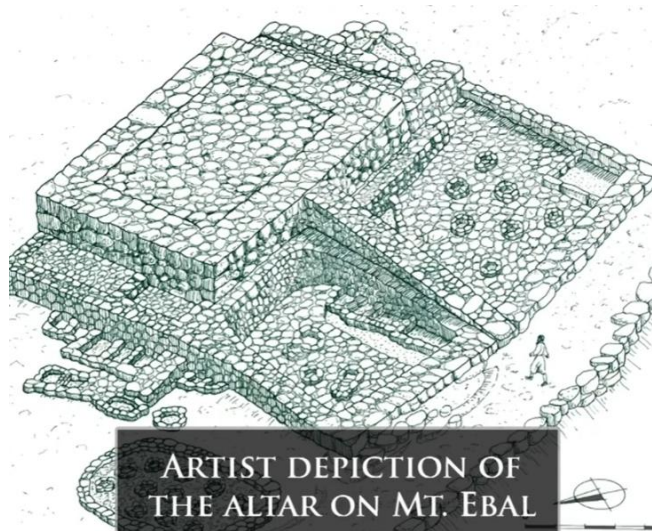


The city is something of a puzzle in terms of the Israelite conquest because there is no mention of hostilities between Israel and Shechem during the conquest. Yet soon after their victory over Ai, the Israelites traveled unmolested to the area of Shechem to build an altar on Mount Ebal and offer burnt offerings, as Moses had commanded them (Deut. 11:29, 27:4-7), and they held a covenant renewal ceremony at that time (Josh. 8:30-35). At the completion of the conquest, the Israelites returned to Shechem for another covenant renewal ceremony (Joshua 24), and they buried Joseph's bones there at the place Jacob had purchased many centuries earlier (Gen. 30:18-20). Wood notes, "This act of burying Joseph in Shechem demonstrates that a peaceful relationship existed between the Israelites and the people of Shechem."⁹⁹

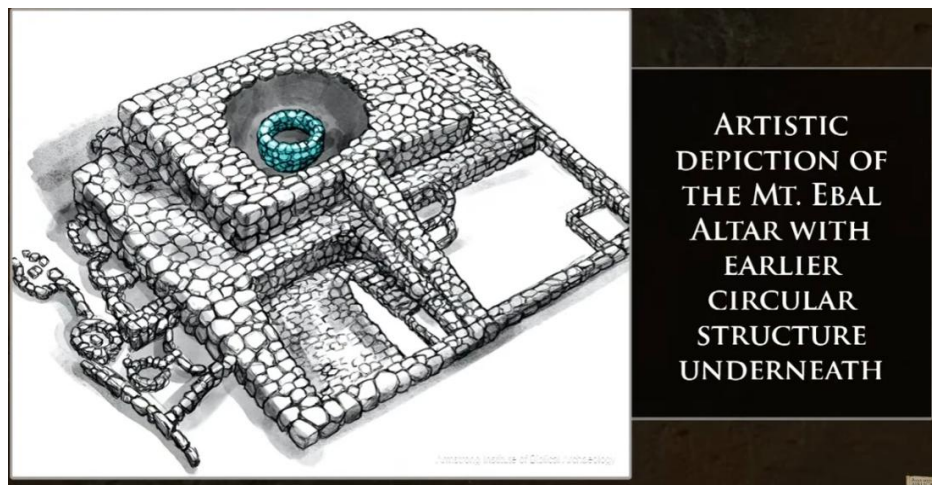
The Israeli archaeologist Adam Zertal excavated a site on the east side of Mount Ebal, known as el-Burnat, from 1982-1989, during which time he found a large rectangular stone altar. He dated that altar to around 1200 B.C. and concluded it was an Israelite altar because it resembled the biblical description of the altar of sacrifice and contained only the bones of ritually clean animals. Because he believed, mistakenly in

⁹⁹ Bryant Wood, "[The Role of Shechem in the Conquest of Canaan](#)" (April 5, 2008). He concludes regarding the apparently friendly relationship: "We shall probably never know the full details as to what lay behind this understanding. . . . The fact that Jacob's descendants retained rights to land at Shechem may have maintained ties between the two communities. Or, it may be that Shechem was concerned about its own safety in the face of the advancing Israelite tribes. On these matters we can only speculate." He says earlier, "One objection to this idea is the strong biblical prohibition against entering into treaties with the inhabitants of the land (Exod 23:32; 34:12, 15; Deut 7:2; Judg 2:2). This prohibition would have to be understood as applying only to the enemies of Israel, i.e. those outside Shechemite dominion."

my view, that the Exodus occurred in the 13th century B.C., he concluded that this was the altar built by Joshua.



But Zertal also found beneath the exact center of the rectangular altar an older circular altar two meters in diameter, known as Installation 94. This positioning indicates that the more recent rectangular altar had been built around the earlier altar site to venerate and protect it.¹⁰⁰



Stripling states:

There was a small amount of Late Bronze IB [Joshua's time] pottery beneath the Iron Age I [time of the judges] pottery and bone matrix. I believe that this pottery, a Late Bronze pumice chalice from Pit 250, a

¹⁰⁰ For the images and supporting information, see, "[Exploring the Cursed Mountain: Digging for Truth Episode](#)" (an interview with Abigail Van Huss, Oct. 20, 2024); Scott Stripling, "[YaHWeh Curse Tablet: A Tsunami from Mt. Ebal](#)" (Nov. 2, 2024); David G. Hansen, "[Shechem: Its Archaeological and Contextual Significance](#)" (June 25, 2010).

small amount of animal bone from inside the round altar, and the Thutmose III scarab all point to a fifteenth-century date for the round altar. Everyone agrees with Zertal that the rectangular altar dates to the thirteenth century. The round altar likely belongs to the late fifteenth century and is plausibly the altar that Joshua built. One hundred percent of the stones of the round altar are unworked as per the requirement of Josh. 8:31.¹⁰¹

Stripling's team wet-sifted the eastern dump site from Zertal's excavation at Mount Ebal, and in 2019 they found what appears to be a lead curse tablet. Tomographic scanning revealed markings on the inside of the tablet, which three epigraphers – Peter van der Veen, Ivana Kumpova, and Gershon Galil – identified as proto-alphabetic script (forerunner of paleo Hebrew) containing curses and the name Yahweh. Their interpretation has been challenged, but if they are correct, this is the earliest known Hebrew inscription in which the name Yahweh is mentioned.¹⁰²



F. Amarna Letters

In 1887, 352 clay tablets were discovered at Tell el-Amarna in Egypt, which include letters written to Pharaoh Amenhotep III (1407-1370 B.C.) and to his son, Amenhotep IV, known as Akhenaten (1370-1353 B.C.), by kings of city-states in Canaan that were under Egypt's influence or control. These include letters in which various Canaanite kings accuse Labayu, king of Shechem, of allying with the "Habiru" and even giving them land from the Shechem city-state.

¹⁰¹ Scott Stripling, "The Fifteenth-Century (Early-Date) Exodus View" in Mark D. Janzen, ed., *The Exodus: Historicity, Chronology, and Theological Implications* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2021), 48.

¹⁰² See, Scott Stripling, et al., ["You are Cursed by the God YHW:" an early Hebrew inscription from Mt. Ebal](#), *Heritage Science* (May 12, 2023) and Scott Stripling, ["YaHWeh Curse Tablet: A Tsunami from Mt. Ebal"](#) (Nov. 2, 2024).



Kennedy says about the Habiru:

The designation *Habiru*, *Hapiru*, or *'Abiru* first appears in the 18th century BC, and then disappears from the record in the 11th century BC.

Throughout the Amarna Letters, the term *Hapiru* appears frequently in reference to enemies of the Canaanite city-states who are continually raiding and conquering parts of Canaan. It is generally understood that *Habiru* or *Hapiru* was a socioeconomic term referring to a group of people who were outsiders, outcasts, fugitives, or refugees living outside of mainstream society, and nomadic or seminomadic bands led by a prominent leader. Although not an ethnic term, and therefore not exclusively equivalent with Hebrew, the understanding of the term *Habiru* does appear to fit that status of the Hebrews in the narratives about the Israelite conquest.¹⁰³

Kennedy explains the possible significance of the complaints against the king of Shechem:

Although during the initial phase of the Israelite conquest when Joshua led a campaign against many cities in Canaan, Shechem stands out because no mention is made in the book of Joshua about an attack on the city. Yet all of the Israelites, along with the local residents, were recorded as gathering between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal at Shechem in a peaceful manner after Jericho and Ai have been destroyed, but before the treaty with Gibeon and the attack on Hazor [Josh. 8:33-35]. This assembly is repeated later in the Joshua narrative, immediately following the end of the initial campaign against the Canaanite city-states [Joshua 24].

Archaeological excavations at Shechem have also demonstrated that there was no destruction of the city until nearly 100 years after the time of Labayu and Joshua. The Amarna Letters record that Shechem was given to the Habiru, who may be linked to the Israelites by descriptions in

¹⁰³ Kennedy (2020), 70 (fn. 35). Stripling (2021), 39, says, "The designation Habiru generally describes marauders in the Late Bronze Age. The Habiru who embraced Yahwistic monotheism became known as biblical Hebrews." For Petrovich's arguments associating the Habiru with the Hebrews, see Petrovich (2021), 188-191.

other letters of the Habiru attacking and conquering various cities and areas in Canaan. In light of the Amarna Letters and excavations, Shechem was not conquered, but instead there may have been a peaceful agreement allowing the area of Shechem to be given to the Israelites rather than taken by force.¹⁰⁴

G. Shechem Temple

The period when Judges ruled in Israel commenced not long after the death of Joshua (Judg. 1:1), which one can reasonably estimate occurred around 1366 B.C., and ended with the anointing of Saul as king (1 Samuel 10) around 1051 B.C. Judges 6-8 reports that because of Israel's evil the Midianites were oppressing them, and God raised up Gideon who freed them from that oppression. Judges 8:33 says, "As soon as Gideon died, the people of Israel turned again and whored after the Baals and made Baal-berith their god." "Baal-berith" means Baal of the covenant.

Gideon had seventy sons by a multitude of wives, but Abimelech was his son by a concubine from Shechem. Abimelech persuaded the people of Shechem to back him as the next ruler instead of one of Gideon's other sons, and they took seventy pieces of silver from the temple in Shechem, "the house of Baal-berith" (Judg. 9:4) to pay Abimelech, which money he used to hire men to follow him. This is in the latter part of the 12th century B.C.

Excavations at Shechem uncovered a temple from this time with a courtyard and large stone in front. Archaeologist James Hoffmeier declares, "Mention was made earlier of the temple discovered at Shechem with the standing stela outside its forecourt. This temple is almost certainly the one mentioned in Judges 9."¹⁰⁵ This temple was built around 1450 B.C. It was a smaller version of a massive temple that had been destroyed about a century earlier. It remained until the city was destroyed and abandoned around 1125 B.C.¹⁰⁶ That destruction fits the time of Abimelech, who is said in Judg. 9:45 to have fought against Shechem and "razed the city."

Joshua 24:25-27 reports that about 250 years earlier, Joshua, as part of a covenant renewal ceremony, erected a large standing stone or pillar under the terebinth or oak tree that was by "the sanctuary of the Lord" in Shechem. That stone was apparently still in place in the time of Abimelech, as Judg. 9:6 says the leaders of Shechem made Abimelech king "by the oak of the pillar at Shechem." It is possible that the "sanctuary of the Lord" near which Joshua erected the stone pillar was the preexisting pagan temple in

¹⁰⁴ Kennedy (2020), 71.

¹⁰⁵ James K. Hoffmeier, *Archaeology of the Bible* (Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2008), 71.

¹⁰⁶ Kennedy (2023), 248-249. Another possibility is that Joshua did not erect his stone pillar near a physical sanctuary but near an unknown spot that was considered holy (a "holy place," NIV) because Abraham had centuries before built an altar there (Gen. 12:6-7). In that case, the pillar near the excavated temple would not be his.

Shechem that the Israelites had converted into a sanctuary of the Lord,¹⁰⁷ only to have it revert to a temple of Baal-berith, the temple from which the Shechemites took the money to pay Abimelech, after the Israelites apostatized as indicated in Judg. 8:33-34. If that is the case, the stone pillar standing before the excavated temple structure is probably the very stone commissioned by Joshua.¹⁰⁸



V. Saul, David, and Solomon (1051 – 930 B.C.)

A. Papyrus Anastasi I

According to Scripture, there were giants in the land of Canaan in the days of Saul and David, Goliath being the most notable. Papyrus Anastasi I dates to the end of the 13th century B.C., so during the time of the Judges. It probably was from Memphis, Egypt,¹⁰⁹ and currently is in the British Museum. The relevant portion says with reference to Canaan:

The narrow valley is dangerous with Bedouin, hidden under the bushes. Some of them are four or five cubits (*from*) *their noses to the heel* [i.e., around 7 to 9 feet tall], and fierce of face. Their hearts are not mild, and they do not listen to wheedling [coaxing]. Thou art alone; there is no

¹⁰⁷ Edward Campbell and James Ross state in "The Excavation of Shechem and the Biblical Tradition," *The Biblical Archaeologist*, 26 (No. 1, Feb. 1963), 11, "The stone and the sanctuary may well have been the large *massabah* and the temple of the Late Bronze age. Certainly these were standing in the early Israelite period and for some time to come. And since the sanctuary is associated with Yahweh, it is probable that Israel used the Late Bronze temple for her own cultic purposes."

¹⁰⁸ Kennedy (2023), 251.

¹⁰⁹ James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. with supplement (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 475.

messenger with thee, no army host behind thee. Thou findest no scout, that he might make thee a way of crossing.¹¹⁰



Old Testament scholars John Walton, Victor Matthews, and Mark Chavalas write in reference to Goliath: "Champions of this size are not simply a figment of Israelite imagination or the result of embellished legends. The Egyptian letter on Papyrus Anastasi I (thirteenth century B.C.) describes fierce warriors in Canaan who are seven to nine feet tall."¹¹¹

B. The Kfar Monash Hoard

Speaking of giants in the land, in 1962, a farmer plowing his field in Kfar Monash in Israel discovered a hoard of ancient copper tools and weapons, which were acquired by the Israeli Department of Antiquities. The following year, Ruth Hestrin and Miriam Tadmor published an article on the find in the *Israel Exploration Journal* in which they dated the items to between 3200 – 2750 B.C. They describe the four spearheads that were found as "the most remarkable group among the Monash finds."¹¹² They state, "The four spearheads are powerful weapons, beautifully proportioned, and of excellent workmanship," and add that they "bear signs of use."

The remarkable thing about the spearheads for our purpose is their size and weight. All of them are larger than common spearheads, but the largest is huge. It is 26" from the tip of the spearhead to the end of the tang and weighs 4½ pounds. Hestrin and Tadmor state: "Obviously, spears were used for hunting large animals; but they were undoubtedly also used in war and fighting, as a personal weapon (and so in a later period on the Eannatum stele). In the case of the Monash spears, however, their unusual size and weight would appear to be an obstacle rather than an aid to anyone carrying them."

The size and weight of those spears would indeed be an obstacle to any normal-size person carrying them, but Scripture reports that there were giants in the land in those

¹¹⁰ ANET, 477-478.

¹¹¹ John Walton, Victor Matthews, and Mark Chavalas, *IVP Background Bible Commentary Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 306-307.

¹¹² Ruth Hestrin and Miriam Tadmor, "A Hoard of Tools and Weapons from Kfar Monash," 13 *Israel Exploration Journal* (No. 4, 1963), 279.

days. Referring to the time of king David, 2 Sam. 21:16 states, "And Ishbi-benob, one of the descendants of the giants, whose spear weighed three hundred shekels of bronze, and who was armed with a new sword, thought to kill David." This giant's entire spear, both the shaft and spearhead, weighed about seven pounds, which is what a spear would weigh if it had the large spearhead found at Monash. As Hestrin and Tadmor note, "These heavy spearheads would have required a long and well-balanced shaft. The complete spearhead and shaft together would form a very long weapon, measuring probably more than the height of a man." Goliath's spearhead weighed about 15 pounds (1 Sam. 17:7), which indicates his extraordinary strength. Here is a picture of the four spearheads and a picture of me holding a cardboard representation of the largest spearhead, including the tang.



C. Pool of Gibeon

2 Samuel 2:12-17 reports the contest between the twelve men of Abner, commander of Ishbosheth's forces, and the twelve men of Joab, commander of David's forces, at the Pool of Gibeon. This is the same site where, after the fall of Jerusalem in 587/586 B.C., Johanan son of Kareah came upon Ishmael the son of Nethaniah in Jer. 41:11-12.

This pool or reservoir was discovered in excavations of the town in 1956-1960 by James Pritchard. A hole about 36 feet in diameter was cut through limestone bedrock down to a level floor at about 37 feet. A staircase and railing were cut into the limestone winding down to the level floor. From there, the stairs drop straight down through a tunnel for another 45 feet to the water table. It apparently was built to provide the inhabitants with a secure supply of water during a time of siege.



VI. Divided Kingdom (Israel and Judah: 930 – 722 B.C.)

A. Shishak Inscription

1 Kings 14:25-26 and 2 Chron. 12:1-9 report that in the fifth year of the reign of the Judean king Rehoboam, Shishak king of Egypt captured fortified cities in Judah and was bought off with treasures when he came against Jerusalem. This is the same Shishak who earlier had given refuge to Jeroboam when he fled from Solomon (1 Ki. 11:40).

In 1825 an inscription dating from about 925 B.C. was found at the temple of Amon in Thebes (modern Luxor), Egypt which confirms this raid by Shishak. Shishak is said in the inscription to have destroyed many cities in Judah (and Israel), but Jerusalem is not among them.



B. Ivory of Samaria

Ahab was king of Israel from about 874-853 B.C. 1 Kings 22:39 reports that he built an "ivory house," probably meaning a house full of ivory inlays in furniture and wall panels. Ivory was a luxury item, which is why Amos about a century later referred to it in Amos 6:1, 4 as a symbol of opulence and false security. He decried, "Woe to those who are at ease in Zion, and to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria . . . Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory and stretch themselves out on their couches . . ."

Excavations last century uncovered the royal palace in Samaria from the time of Omri and Ahab. They also uncovered the remains of more than two hundred fragments of ivory inlay found in a storehouse near the palace.



C. Stela of Shalmaneser III (Kurkh Stele)

1 Kings 20 reports Ahab's victory over the Syrian king Ben-hadad. Rather than kill Ben-hadad, Ahab makes a covenant with him and releases him. A prophet then condemns Ahab for having done so. 1 Kings 22:1 says that Israel and Syria were at peace for three years.

Ahab may have been tempted to make a covenant with Ben-hadad because of the rising threat posed by the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III, who ruled in Assyria from 858-824 B.C. Shalmaneser was making his way westward until he was temporarily checked in 853 B.C. in the battle of Qarqar, about 150 miles north of Damascus. Shalmaneser's annals of this campaign are inscribed on a stela found in 1861 in Tell Kurkh in Syria by a British consul named J. C. Taylor. Shalmaneser claims he had a great victory at Qarqar, bragging that he choked the river with his enemies' corpses, but

the fact he did not occupy the land and did not undertake another campaign to the west for a number of years makes it clear that he suffered a setback there.

What is significant is that Shalmanesser specifically refers to Ben-hadad (Hadad-ezer of Aram) and "Ahab the Israelite." He also represents them as allies fighting against him at Qarqar right in the time frame Scripture records they were at peace with one another.



D. Mesha Stela (Moabite Stone)

The three years of peaceful alliance between Israel and Syria ended soon after the battle of Qarqar (853 B.C.) when Ahab recruited Jehoshaphat the king of Judah to help him recover Ramoth-gilead from the king of Syria. In keeping with Macaiah's prophecy, Ahab was killed in the battle, and his son Ahaziah became king of Israel. 2 Kings 1:1, 3:4-5 note that when Ahab died Mesha the king of Moab, who had been paying tribute to Israel, rebelled against the king of Israel.

In 1868 a Bedouin in Jordan discovered a stela (3 feet high and 2 feet wide) containing 35 lines of inscription celebrating the accomplishments of Mesha the king of Moab, which he brought to the attention of a German missionary named F. A. Klein. This stela is believed to have been commissioned by Mesha somewhere between 840-820 B.C. Fortunately, a *papier-mâché* (a squeeze) of the inscription was made by Ya'qub Karavaca. I say fortunately because the Bedouins, not liking that the Turks were brought in to help negotiate the purchase of the stone, broke it into scores of pieces. Some 57 pieces comprising about two-thirds of the inscription ultimately were purchased. Using the paper cast, a French scholar named Charles Clermont-Ganneau reconstructed the entire inscription in 1870.

The inscription records that the Israelite king Omri and his sons had ruled over Moab for many years, but Mesha threw off their domination. It recounts a military campaign that he waged to recover some land from Israel. This presumably was part of

the initial "rebellion" mentioned in 2 Ki. 1:1, 3:5, which prompted Ahaziah's successor, Jehoram (Joram), to recruit Jehoshaphat the king of Judah to fight against Moab. Though Israel and Judah (and Edom) inflicted losses on Moab, Jehoram (Joram) failed to reinstitute Israelite control over Moab (2 Kings 3). The inscription also refers to "Yahweh," the God of Israel.



In 1994 Andre Lemaire reconstructed the text at a break near the end of the inscription to read "And the house [of Da]vid dwelt in Horonen." In a paper published in 2019, Professor Michael Langlois, employing a modern imaging technique, confirmed that reading.¹¹³ He said in a recent interview:

Then when we celebrated the 150th anniversary of the discovery of the Mesha inscription in 2018, I decided to use modern techniques, especially Reflectance Transformation Imaging (RTI), to see if I could get a better reading of Line 31 and other lines. When I did that [and restudied the text], I concluded that the only two possible readings that made sense in the context and with the shape of the lines were either *Bet David*, which means the "house of David," or *Ben David*, which is "son of David." Either way, this text designated the king that was ruling at the time, either calling him a descendant of King David or someone from the house of David, which means the dynasty of David.¹¹⁴

In an article published in 2022, Lemaire and Jean-Philippe Delorme asserted that the new sophisticated photographic evidence confirmed the reference to David.¹¹⁵ That

¹¹³ Michael Langlois, "The Kings, the City and the House of David on the Mesha Stele in Light of New Imaging Techniques," *Semitica* 61 (2019), 23-47.

¹¹⁴ "[The Second 'House of David' Inscription](#)," *Let the Stones Speak* (May-June 2024).

¹¹⁵ André Lemaire and Jean-Philippe Delorme, "[Mesha's Stele and the House of David](#)," *Biblical Archaeology Review* (Winter, 2022).

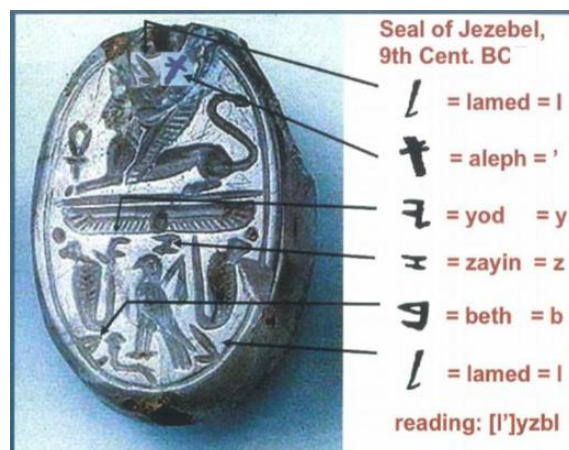
makes this one of only two (possibly three – Shoshenq I inscription per Kitchen) known mentions of David outside the Bible.

E. Seal of Jezebel

Ahab was a wicked king of Israel in the 9th century B.C., who, probably for political reasons, married Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, who was king of the Phoenician city of Sidon (1 Ki. 16:31). Jezebel was an evil queen, who was bent on substituting Baal for Yahweh within Israel. Indeed, her name means "where is Baal?" She had Naboth murdered on Ahab's behalf and murdered many of God's prophets. She met a grisly end when Jehu had her eunuchs throw her out the window of her royal residence at Jezreel (2 Ki. 9:30-33).

In the 1960s, a large (over an inch) and fancy opal seal, suggestive of royalty, was purchased in the antiquities market and donated to the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. It is considered to be a seal of Queen Jezebel because (a) its large size and fanciness are indicative of royalty, (b) the form of the letters is Phoenician, (c) "the seal is filled with common Egyptian symbols that were often used in Phoenicia in the ninth century BC and are suggestive of a queen,"¹¹⁶ and (d) the seal has the final four letters of the name "Jezebel," missing only the first letter (an aleph), which presumably was in the place where the seal is damaged.

Marjo Korpel, who published on the inscription in 2008, concluded, "I believe it is very likely that we have here the seal of the famous Queen Jezebel." Kennedy states: "Even though the 'Jezebel seal' was first published after being noticed on the antiquities market, analysis of the seal has also authenticated it as a genuine Phoenician artifact. Therefore, identification of the seal with Queen Jezebel of the northern kingdom of Israel in the 9th century BC is not only plausible, but the only viable option."¹¹⁷



¹¹⁶ "[Seal of Jezebel Identified](#)" (first published in Spring 2008 issue of *Bible and Spade*; updated online in June 2019).

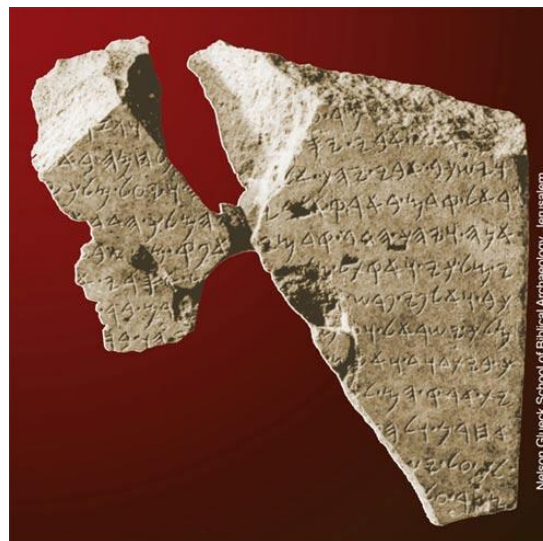
¹¹⁷ Kennedy (2020), 119.

F. Tell Dan Stela

2 Kings 8:25-29 reports that Jehoram (Joram), the king of Israel, and Ahaziah, the recently installed king of Judah, made war against Hazael king of Syria at Ramoth-gilead. Hazael had become king of Syria by murdering Ben-hadad. Ahaziah was Jehoram's nephew (2 Ki. 8:26) and walked in the wicked ways of Ahab's house. Jehoram (Joram) was wounded in the battle at Ramoth-gilead and went to Jezreel to convalesce. Ahaziah visited him there. This is around 841 B.C.

Jehu was a military commander in Israel (2 Ki. 9:5) whom God called to destroy the wicked house of Ahab in order to avenge on Jezebel the blood of the prophets and the other servants of God (2 Ki. 9:7). He killed Jehoram (Joram) at Jezreel, and his men mortally wounded the fleeing Ahaziah, who subsequently died at Megiddo. Jehu served as king of Israel from around 841-814 B.C. (2 Kings 9-10).

In excavations at Dan in northern Israel in 1993 and 1994, Avraham Biran found pieces of a stela dating from the mid- to late-ninth century B.C. The stela was commissioned by a Syrian king who refers to his battle with the kings of Israel and Judah. Though the names of the kings of Israel and Judah are only partially preserved, the only pair of kings that could fit what is preserved is Jehoram (Joram) and Ahaziah. So this stela very likely was commissioned by Hazael to brag about military accomplishments at the beginning of his reign.



In this stela, Hazael may claim to have killed Jehoram (Joram) and Ahaziah, which obviously conflicts with the scriptural record which reports that Jehu killed them. I say "may claim" because Shigeo Yamada translates the verb here as "strike, defeat" rather than "kill." Its usual sense, however, is "kill." If Hazael does indeed claim to have *killed* both kings, it is not hard to believe that he would take credit for their deaths since both kings had been fighting in the battle, Jehoram (Joram) had even been wounded, and both kings died soon after the battle (within the time Jehoram was still recovering from

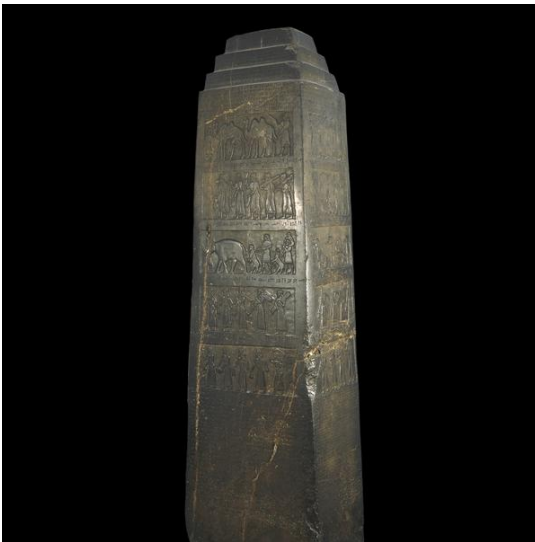
his wounds). Even if he knew about Jehu, claiming credit for their deaths is conceivable, especially in a piece of propaganda, because it was his forces that wounded Jehoram thus setting the stage for Jehoram and Ahaziah being vulnerable at Jezreel.

This stela refers to Ahaziah as being of the "house of David." The only other known mentions of David outside the Bible are the Mesha Stela (Moabite Stone) and possibly the Shoshenq I inscription (per Kitchen), so this is very significant. Prior to these discoveries, a number of modern scholars dismissed the David narratives as propaganda fabricated in Babylonian captivity to give Israel a respectable history.

G. Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III

After destroying the house of Ahab (2 Kings 9-10), Jehu ruled as king of Israel from around 841-814 B.C. In 1846 Austen Henry Layard discovered in Calah (modern Nimrud) a four-sided pillar of black limestone that is 6 feet six inches high. It is known as the Black Obelisk¹¹⁸ of Shalmaneser III because it commemorates through relief sculptures and inscriptions military campaigns during his reign.

He says that in the campaign in 841 B.C. he besieged Damascus, which was governed by Hazael, and received tribute from Jehu. Panels depict Israelites carrying various items of tribute and one shows Jehu, or more probably his ambassador, bowing before Shalmaneser. It is more probably Jehu's ambassador because his dress is not distinctive, which is what one would expect for a king. The inscription identifies the supplicant as "Jehu, son of Omri" and says "I received from him silver, gold, a golden saplu-bowl, a golden vase with pointed bottom, golden tumblers, golden buckets, tin, a staff for a king, [and] wooden puruhtu."

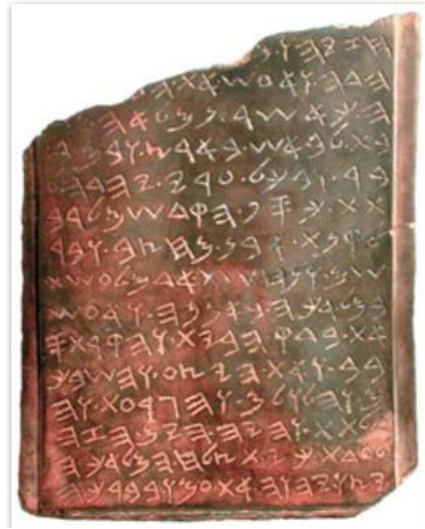


¹¹⁸ An obelisk is a pillar of stone set up as a monument usually having four sides and tapering at the top.

Jehu's paying tribute to Shalmanesser is not mentioned in Scripture, but it seems he opted as a new king to buy peace with Assyria rather than engage them in war. He is described as "son of Omri" not because he is a descendant of Omri but because Omri (1 Ki. 16:15-29) had been made such an impression on the Assyrians that all subsequent rulers of the land were identified with him; the "house of Omri" had become the Assyrian name for the land of Israel.

H. Jehoash Inscription

In 2 Ki. 12:4-15 and 2 Chron. 24:4-14, the Judean king Jehoash (Joash) ordered repairs to be made to the temple. In 2001, a partially broken gray sandstone tablet appeared on the antiquities market that was inscribed with a paleo-Hebrew script that was used in the time of Jehoash. It "was allegedly found by accident near the eastern wall of the Temple Mount of Jerusalem in a Muslim cemetery when a grave was being dug."¹¹⁹



Kennedy states:

Many scholars from various fields have studied and debated its authenticity. Analysis of the stone indicates that it originated in the Jerusalem area; residue found on the stone demonstrates its antiquity; remnants of melted gold found on it suggests that the stone may have been in the temple area when the Babylonians burned down the temple in 587 BC, causing gold to melt. All of this, together with the form of the letters and the mention of King Jehoash of Judah, would place the inscription in the 9th century BC.

No consensus was reached on the studies conducted on the script, language, and grammar, but several experts concluded that the inscription is either authentic or that there is no evidence to prove it is a forgery.

¹¹⁹ Kennedy (2023), 139.

According to the inscription on the tablet, repairs to the temple were ordered by King Jehoash of Judah (he reigned ca. 835-796 BC), son of Ahaziah, which parallels the records in the books of Kings and Chronicles (2 Kings 12:1-14; 2 Chronicles 24:4-14). If authentic, the inscription would be attestation of the existence of the temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem, King Jehoash of Judah, and repairs to the temple recorded in the Bible.¹²⁰

I. Rimah Inscription

Jehoash (Joash) king of Israel (not to be confused with the Joash [Jehoash] who was earlier king of Judah) is mentioned in 2 Kings 13. He reigned from around 798-782 B.C. A 51-inch-high stela was discovered in 1967 at Tell al-Rimah in Iraq which recounts military efforts of the Assyrian king Adad-nirari III, who reigned from around 810-782 B.C. The inscription states that Adad-nirari "received the tribute of Joash of Samaria." This probably occurred during Adad-nirari's western campaign of 796 B.C.



J. Shema' Seal

The eighth century B.C. ushered in prosperous times for both Israel and Judah. Jeroboam II ruled in Israel from 793-753 B.C., and Uzziah (Azariah) ruled in Judah from 792-740 B.C. Assyria, under Adad-nirari III (810-782 B.C.), had vanquished Damascus in 802 B.C., which freed Israel from Syria's (Aram's) dominance. Then in the first half of the eighth century B.C., Assyria itself went into a temporary decline. Under these

¹²⁰ Ibid.

circumstances, Jeroboam II and Uzziah (Azariah) brought Israel and Judah to a prominence second only to Solomon's golden age. The kingdoms prospered financially and expanded their borders.

The ancient seal was a stamp or engraving of a design or inscription or both set in a hard substance like stone or metal. It was used to make an impression on clay or wax and functioned like a modern signature. A person's unique seal was put on an object as a sign of authenticity or ownership.

In excavations at Megiddo in 1904, Gottlieb Schumacher uncovered a large and beautifully made jasper seal that from the style of the inscribed letters was dated to the early eighth century B.C. Above the roaring lion is the name of the seal's owner and below it his title: "(Belonging) to Shema' servant (of) Jeroboam." Shema' was evidently a high official in the administration of Jeroboam II, but since he is not mentioned in the Bible, we do not know what his duties were. The seal disappeared after being sent to the Turkish Sultan in Istanbul, but before it was sent to him a bronze cast was made, which is now at the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem.



K. Uzziah Seals

There are two ancient seals mentioning king Uzziah (Azariah), both of which are of unknown origin and are in the Louvre Museum in Paris. One is a ring seal made of agate that measures 0.63 x 0.47 inches. It has an Egyptian motif, and the inscription reads: "(Belonging) to Abiah servant of Uzziah." The other is a two-sided seal measuring 0.87 x 0.63 inches. The side with the man carrying the staff has the name "Shebaniah / Sebnayu." The other side says "(Belonging) to Shebaniah / Sebnayu servant of Uzziah."



Uzziah also is mentioned in an inscription dating from between 130 B.C – A.D. 70 (so centuries after Uzziah died). It is part of the antiquities collection at the Russian Convent on the Mount of Olives that was acquired in the late 1800s. It says, "Here were brought the bones of Uzziah king of Judah -- do not open!" From this it appears that Uzziah's bones were moved to another place some 600-700 years after their original interment. Perhaps, since he was a leper (2 Chron. 26:21-23), some felt his remains were unclean and needed to be moved outside the City of David.



L. Annals of Tiglath-pileser III

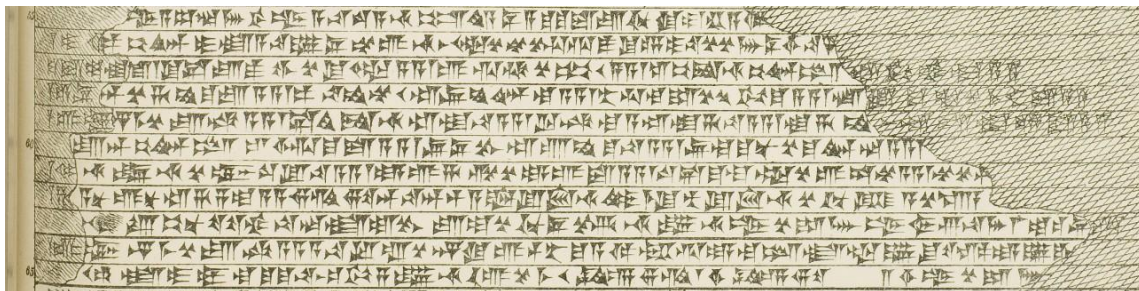
2 Kings 15:19-20 reports that Menahem, who was king of Israel from around 752-742 B.C., paid the Assyrian king Pul, better known as Tiglath-pileser III, a thousand talents of silver. The so-called "annals" of Tiglath-pileser, which are inscribed clay tablets discovered by Layard at Calah (modern Nimrud) in 1845, state that Tiglath-pileser

"received tribute from . . . Menahem of Samaria"¹²¹ and others and includes silver in the itemization of the collective tribute that was paid.



M. Building Inscription of Tiglath-pileser III

In 2 Kings 16 the Judean king Ahaz is attacked by Pekah king of Israel and Rezin king of Syria, presumably to force him to join their alliance against Assyria (see also Isa. 7:1-6). The chronology of Ahaz's reign is difficult to sort out, but it seems to have run from 735-715 B.C. with part of that time involving co-regencies of some kind.¹²² Around 734 B.C. he appealed to Assyria for help, as noted in 2 Kings 16, sending silver and gold and agreeing to become an Assyrian vassal. A building inscription from Tiglath-pileser's reign lists among those from whom he received tribute "Jehoahaz (the longer form of Ahaz's name) of Judah."¹²³ Here is a reproduction of the text published by Henry Rawlinson in the 1860s in *The Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia*, Bd. II: *A Selection from the Miscellaneous Inscriptions of Assyria*.



¹²¹ ANET, 283.

¹²² See especially Andrew Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 2011), 135-144; see also, Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests A History of Old Testament Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 402-404; Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *A History of Israel From the Bronze Age Through the Jewish Wars* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 371.

¹²³ ANET, 282.

N. Annals and Relief of Tiglath-pileser III

Tiglath-pileser gladly responded to Ahaz's request. 2 Kings 15:29 (see also 1 Chron. 5:6, 26) states "In the days of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria came and captured Ijon, Abel-beth-maacah, Janoah, Kedesh, Hazor, Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali, and he carried the people captive to Assyria." This invasion is recorded in Tiglath-pileser's annals for the years 733-732 B.C. He says he took the inhabitants of Israel (lit. "Omri-land") to Assyria and mentions some towns in Galilee. A relief scene celebrates the capture of Ashteroth just north of Gilead.



Tiglath-pileser also says in his annals that they (the Israelites) overthrew Pekah and that he placed Hoshea as king over them.¹²⁴ This fits nicely with the report in 2 Ki. 15:30 that Hoshea struck down Pekah at that time. And, of course, Tiglath-pileser was no friend to Judah (2 Chron. 28:16-21).

O. Ahaz Seals

In 1998 Robert Deutsch published a reddish-brown seal (actually a bulla)¹²⁵ from a private collection with the following inscription: "Ahaz (son of) Jehotham [long form of Jotham], king of Judah." So both Ahaz and his father Jotham are listed on this seal. Deutsch also published another seal from Ahaz's reign which reads: "Ushna servant of Ahaz." Ahaz also is mentioned in a seal that names him as the father of Hezekiah (see below).

¹²⁴ ANET, 284.

¹²⁵ A bulla is a clay blob that sealed a document and into which was impressed the seal of the owner or writer of the document. They would harden from air drying, but on those occasions in which the building housing the documents was burned they would be fired like pottery becoming almost indestructible.



P. Hoshea Seal

Hoshea was the last king of the northern kingdom of Israel. He reigned from around 732-722 B.C. In 1995 Andre Lemaire published a seal from a private collection that was dated by the style and iconography to Samaria around 750-722 B.C. It measures about 1 x 0.66 inches, and the Hebrew inscription reads, "Belonging to Abdi, servant/minister of Hoshea."



Q. Sargon's Palace

Isaiah 20:1 mentions that the Philistine city of Ashdod was captured by a military commander sent by Sargon king of Assyria. This is the only place in ancient literature that mentions this Sargon, and for that reason many concluded he was a fictional character.

In 1843, Paul Emile Botta discovered in Dur-Sharrukin (modern Khorsabad), about 12 miles northeast of Nineveh, a large palace that Sargon had begun building. The site was extensively reinvestigated by the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago nearly a century after Botta's work, and additional texts and inscriptions were recovered.

The entrance to the throne room was guarded by a massive pair of human-headed, winged bulls, measuring about 14 feet high (now in the Louvre Museum), and an inscription refers to Sargon as "conqueror of Samaria and of the entire [country of] Israel" (lit. Omri-land). The attack on Ashdod noted in Isa. 20:1, which occurred around 712 B.C., also is confirmed in various inscriptions from Khorsabad.¹²⁶

2 Kings 17:1-6 reports the fall of Samaria and the deportation of its people in 722-721 B.C. Sargon II succeeded Shalmaneser V as king of Assyria right around this time, and there is some uncertainty about Sargon's role in the actual fall of Samaria, though he certainly claims credit for it some years later.



VII. Southern Kingdom Alone (Judah: 722 – 587 B.C.)

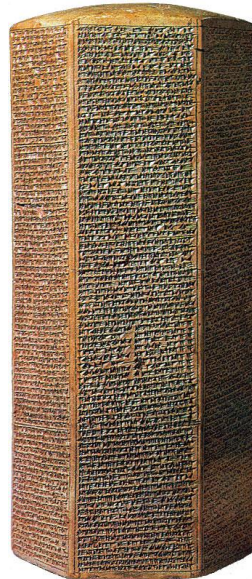
A. Taylor Prism

2 Kings 18:7 states that Hezekiah king of Judah rebelled against the king of Assyria. 2 Kings 18:13 reports that in the fourteenth year of Hezekiah's reign Sennacherib, who was king of Assyria from around 704-681 B.C., captured the fortified

¹²⁶ ANET, 285-286.

cities of Judah. Hezekiah sent word to Sennacherib at Lachish confessing that he had done wrong and offering to pay whatever tribute Sennacherib imposed. Sennacherib demanded 300 talents of silver and 30 talents of gold, a talent being roughly 75 pounds, and Hezekiah sent all that he could come up with from the temple and the palace (18:14-16). Sennacherib apparently was not satisfied and sent envoys to Hezekiah urging the people to surrender the city or else face destruction (18:17-35). After another threat from Sennacherib in 2 Ki. 19:8-13, Isaiah assured Hezekiah (19:32-34) that Sennacherib would not lay siege to Jerusalem but would leave because God was going to defend the city. And that night, an angel of the Lord killed 185,000 Assyrians (see also 2 Chronicles 32).

In 1830 British Colonel R. Taylor discovered a six-sided inscribed pillar in Sennacherib's palace in Nineveh, which is now known as the Taylor Prism. It is an account of Sennacherib's invasion of Judah and his taking of the fortified cities, thus confirming the report in Scripture. Other copies of this prism have since been found which are known as the Nimrud Prism and the Oriental Institute Prism.



Sennacherib refers to "Hezekiah, the Jew" and declares that he made him a prisoner in Jerusalem, "like a bird in a cage," having surrounded him with "earthworks [watchtowers] in order to molest those who were leaving his city's gate." What is striking, however, is that he makes no claim actually to have laid siege to the city or to have captured it. Given the usual boasting done in royal records, you can be sure that if Sennacherib had captured Jerusalem, he would have bragged about it. And you can be equally sure that if he had suffered a humiliating defeat, he would turn that sow's ear into a silk purse or not report it at all.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Regarding 2 Ki. 19:35-37, Paul House writes in *1, 2 Kings*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 371: "No other ancient texts record [the Lord's killing of 185,000 Assyrian soldiers], which is not surprising in view of their consistently positive viewpoint. Normally only victories were recorded. Assyrian texts do refer to Sennacherib's return to Nineveh, and Herodotus [a fifth-century B.C. Greek historian] shows that there was in Egypt the memory of an Assyrian retreat following a divine intervention." Though

It seems clear from various chronological links that this campaign by Sennacherib was waged in 701 B.C. This date appears to conflict with certain chronological information in Scripture relating to the reigns of various Judean kings. It is quite possible, however, that Hezekiah's reign began in 715 B.C. in the sense of his beginning to rule alone.¹²⁸ In that case, 701 B.C. would be the fourteenth year of his reign as indicated in 2 Ki. 18:13.

Interestingly, Sennacherib claims to have received from Hezekiah 30 talents of gold, which is the precise amount that Scripture reports he demanded from Hezekiah. Sennacherib also states, however, that Hezekiah sent to him (at Nineveh) "800 talents of silver, precious stones, antimony, large cuts of red stone, couches (inlaid) with ivory, *nîmedu*-chairs (inlaid) with ivory, elephant-hides, ebony-wood, boxwood (and) all kinds of valuable treasures, . . ."¹²⁹ One possible solution to the difference between the 300 talents of silver demanded and the 800 talents mentioned in Sennacherib's record is that the 800 talents refers not just to the silver but to the amount of all goods delivered in addition to the gold. Perhaps Hezekiah piled on tons of additional valuables to offset a shortage of silver (Scripture does not identify the amounts actually given) but to no avail. Of course, Sennacherib's 800 talents could refer to the amount of silver given and simply be some kind of error in transmission.

Sennacherib also refers here to "Hezekiah, the Jew" in recounting that king Padi of Ekron was deposed by his subjects because he was loyal to Assyria. He says they "handed him over to Hezekiah, the Jew (and) he held him in prison, unlawfully."

B. Lachish Reliefs

2 Kings 18:14 indicates that Sennacherib had captured the fortified city of Lachish; otherwise, Hezekiah would not have sent word to him there. In the mid-nineteenth century, Layard discovered stone reliefs from Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh depicting the conquest of Lachish during this campaign. The reliefs reveal details of the siege techniques and various military trappings. They portray some captives stripped naked and impaled on stakes, and others departing the city in carts or on foot. The fact there was no relief relating to Jerusalem, the capital, confirms that there was nothing to brag about there.

that memory placed the event at the Egyptian-Palestinian border and attributed the deliverance to an Egyptian god, it possibly is a warped recollection of this miraculous deliverance.

¹²⁸ See Merrill, 402-405, 410; Kaiser, 346.

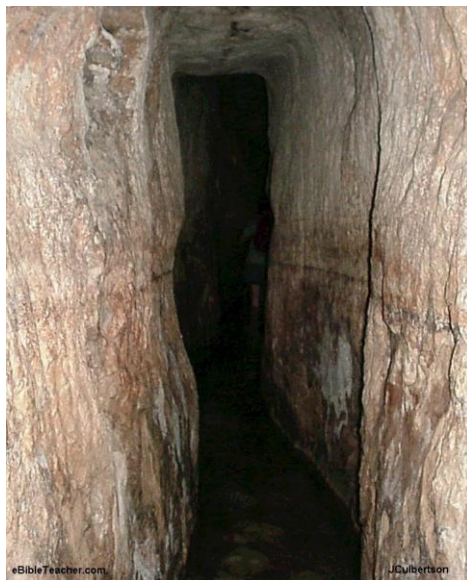
¹²⁹ ANET, 288.



C. Hezekiah's Tunnel and Siloam Inscription

2 Kings 20:20 and 2 Chron. 32:3-4, 30 reveal that Hezekiah prepared for the anticipated siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib by blocking up the water sources outside the city, so they would not be available to the Assyrians, and creating a tunnel to bring water into the city (see also Isa. 22:9-11). 2 Chronicles 32:30 specifies that he directed the waters of the Gihon Spring to the west side of the "city of David."

Hezekiah's tunnel was discovered in 1838 by an American scholar named Edward Robinson. It runs in a southwestern direction from the Gihon Spring just outside of Hezekiah's eastern city wall to the Pool of Siloam in the southwestern corner of the "city of David," meaning the oldest area within the larger city of Jerusalem (i.e., the southeastern hill). The tunnel winds its way for 1,750 feet (a direct route of about 1,090 feet) with an average height of about six feet.



In 1880 an inscription of six lines written in Hebrew dating from the eighth century B.C. was discovered inside the tunnel by some Arab boys. It is known as the Siloam Inscription, and it explains how the tunnel was dug. It states (*ABD*, VI:24):

[] the tunneling, and this was how the tunneling was completed: as [the stonecutters wielded] their picks, each crew toward the other, and while there were still three cubits to g[o], the voices of the men calling each other [could be hear]d, since there was an increase (in sound) on the right [and lef]t. The day the breach was made, the stonecutters hacked toward each other, pick against pick, and the water flowed from the source to the pool [twel]ve hundred cubits, even though the height of the rock above the heads of the stonecutte[rs] was a hundred cubits!

Fortunately, several casts were made of the inscription because it was later chiseled from the wall in the dead of night. The inscription was recovered, but it was broken.



D. Hezekiah's Broad Wall

2 Chronicles 32:5 and Isa. 22:9-10 reveal that Hezekiah's preparations in anticipation of an assault by Sennacherib included building up the breaks in the city wall and building an additional wall outside of it. This additional wall probably was built to enclose the "Second Quarter" (2 Ki. 22:14), the area to the west of the walled city that had become occupied during the population explosion following the collapse of Samaria decades earlier.

In excavations begun in 1969, Nahman Avigad discovered a section of a massive wall on the north side of the "Second Quarter" that is dated by associated pottery to the late eighth century B.C. It is called the "Broad Wall" because the lengthy section that was uncovered (over 200 feet) is 23 feet wide. The remains of private dwellings were found

under the wall, presumably an ancient form of eminent domain, which reminds one of Isa. 22:10.



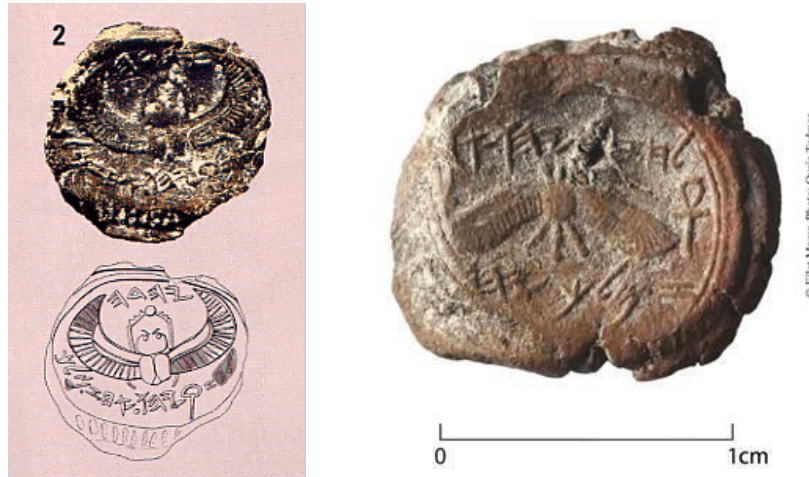
You should be aware that in April 2024 researchers from a mass spectrometry laboratory and archaeologists from the Israel Antiquities Authority and Tel Aviv University published a paper asserting that the Broad Wall was several decades older than the time of Hezekiah, putting its construction near the end of king Uzziah's reign. If that is correct, it presumably was part of a rebuilding effort after the massive earthquake during Uzziah's reign that is mentioned in Amos 1:1 and Zech. 14:5.¹³⁰

E. Hezekiah Seals

A seal (actually a bulla) from a private collection was published in 1999 by Frank Moore Cross with an inscription "Belonging to Hezekiah, (son of) Ahaz, king of Judah." By 2002 there were six known bullae with the same two-winged scarab image and the identical inscription, "Belonging to Hezekiah son of Ahaz, king of Judah," one of which is pictured below (on left).¹³¹ In late 2015, it was announced that a bulla found in 2009 in excavations (not from a private collection!) by Israeli archaeologist Eilat Mazar just south of the Temple Mount has the same inscription: "Belonging to Hezekiah son of Ahaz, king of Judah" (below on right).

¹³⁰ Johanna Regev, Yuval Gadot, Joe Uziel, and Elisabetta Boaretto, "[Radiocarbon chronology of Iron Age Jerusalem reveals calibration offsets and architectural developments](#)," *PNAS* (April 29, 2024). Israel Finkelstein states in "[Observations on the article Regev et al., Radiocarbon Dates for Iron Age Jerusalem, PNAS 2024](#)," (May 2024), "All in all, it seems to me that the new evidence cannot decide the exact date of construction of the fortification in the mid-to-late 8th century. For the time being, this needs to be left to historical considerations."

¹³¹ See Robert Deutsch, "Lasting Impressions: New Bullae Reveal Egyptian-style Emblems on Judah's Royal Seals," *Biblical Archaeology Review* (Vol. 28, No. 4, July/August 2002), 42-51, 60.



F. Seal of Nathan-melech

Nathan-melech is named in 2 Ki. 23:11 as a court official who served during the reign of the Judean king Josiah (640-609 B.C.). In 2019 excavations of the Givati Parking Lot in Jerusalem by Yuval Gadot yielded a bulla with the inscription "(belonging) to Nathan-melech, servant of the king."



G. Seals of Gedaliah and Jehucal/Jucal

Jeremiah 38:1-4 reads: *Now Shephatiah the son of Mattan, Gedaliah the son of Pashhur, Jucal the son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur the son of Malchiah heard the words that Jeremiah was saying to all the people,* ² *"Thus says the LORD: He who stays in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence, but he who goes out to the Chaldeans shall live. He shall have his life as a prize of war, and live."* ³ *Thus says the LORD: This city shall surely be given into the hand of the army of the king of Babylon and be taken."* ⁴ *Then the officials said to the king, "Let this man be put to death, for he is weakening the hands of the soldiers who are left in this city, and the hands of all the*

people, by speaking such words to them. For this man is not seeking the welfare of this people, but their harm." Jehucal (Jucal is an alternate spelling) also is mentioned in Jer. 37:3.

In 2005, Eilat Mazar discovered in her excavations just south of the Temple Mount a bulla inscribed with "Jehucal son of Shelemiah." Two years later, she uncovered near the same spot a bulla inscribed with "Gedaliah son of Pashur." Mazar states, "It's not often that such discoveries happen in which real figures of the past shake off the dust of history and so vividly revive the stories of the Bible."¹³² The bullae are below (Jehucal on the left, Gedaliah on the right).



H. Babylonian Chronicle

In the late seventh-century B.C., the Babylonians replaced the Assyrians as the dominant power in the Ancient Near East. In 605 and 597 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar came against Judah and deported some of its inhabitants. In 597 he took king Jehoiachin (Jeconiah) to Babylon and put his uncle Zedekiah (Mattaniah) on the throne in his place (2 Ki. 24:11-17; Jer. 24:1, 37:1).

Shortly after World War II, the curator of the British Museum, an Assyriologist named Donald Wiseman, discovered that tablets sitting in the museum since the nineteenth century were a history of events in the southern part of Mesopotamia from around 2350 B.C. down to the sixth century B.C.

¹³² See Stephen Flurry, "[Royal Seal of Prophet Jeremiah's Accuser Found](#)" (July 31, 2008).

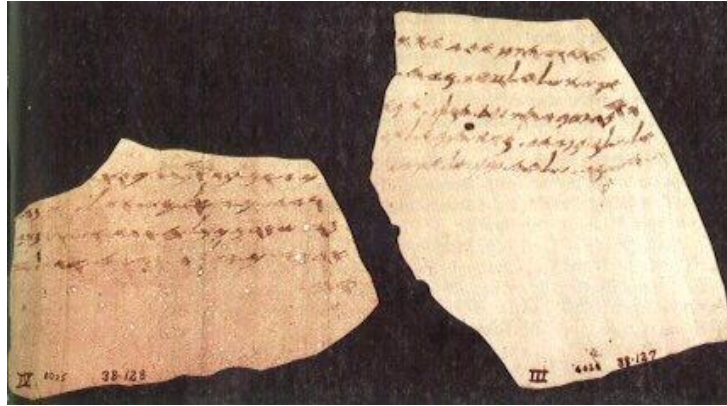


They are known as the Babylonian Chronicle. It is thought this was compiled to inform the Persian kings of the history of the area prior to their conquest of it in 539 B.C. The Chronicle is not complete, but some information relating to the gaps is available from other sources. The entry for the year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign corresponding to 597 B.C. describes Nebuchadnezzar as capturing the king of Judah and installing a king of his choice.

1. Lachish Ostraca

In 587 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar came against Judah again, this time destroying Jerusalem. Jeremiah 34:7 refers to that final campaign and mentions that Lachish and Azekah were the only fortified cities in Judea other than Jerusalem still holding out against Nebuchadnezzar's assault. Azekah is 18 miles southwest of Jerusalem, and Lachish is 11 miles south of Azekah.

In 1935 and 1938, British excavator J. L. Starkey discovered in the ruins of Lachish (Tell ed-Duweir) 21 ostraca, which are broken pieces of pottery. On some of these ostraca messages had been written during the time of Jer. 34:7 when Nebuchadnezzar's army was advancing on Jerusalem. Most of the Lachish letters appear to be dispatches from a Jewish subordinate named Hoshaiiah to his commander Yaush in Lachish (though there is some dispute about his location). Hoshaiiah apparently was stationed at an outpost and was responsible for interpreting the fire signals from Azekah and Lachish during that time. Lachish Ostrakon IV includes: "And let my lord know that we are watching for the signals of Lachish, according to all the indications which my lord hath given, for we do not see Azekah."



J. Nebo-Sarsekim Tablet

Jeremiah 39:3 is best translated as saying that Nebo-Sarsekim (NIV, NET) or Nebusarsechim (HCSB, CSB; see also ESV), chief officer of Nebuchadnezzar, was present at the fall of Jerusalem.¹³³ In 2007 Michael Jursa, an associate professor at the University of Vienna, was searching in the British Museum for Babylonian financial accounts. He deciphered the cuneiform inscription on a small tablet that had been uncovered in the 1870s and acquired by the museum in 1920. It was a receipt dated to the 10th year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II, which makes it 595 B.C. The receipt was for a gift of gold made to a temple in Babylon, located about a mile from modern Baghdad. The donor identified in the receipt is Nebo-Sarsekim, Nebuchadnezzar's chief eunuch. The full translation of the tablet reads:

[Regarding] 1.5 minas [0.75 kg = 26.5 oz. = 1.6 lbs.] of gold, the property of Nabu-sharrussu-ukin [= Hebrew name translated Nebo-Sarsekim], the chief eunuch, which he sent via Arad-Banitu the eunuch to [the temple] Esangila. Arad-Banitu has delivered [it] to Esangila. In the presence of Bel-usat, son of Alpaya, the royal bodyguard, [and of] Nadin, son of Marduk-zer-ibni. Month XI, day 18, year 10 [of] Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.

Dr. Irving Finkel, a British Museum expert, commented: "A throwaway detail in the Old Testament turns out to be accurate and true. I think that it means that the whole narrative [of Jeremiah] takes on a new kind of power."¹³⁴

¹³³ See comments in Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37-52*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 84-85. This reading is confirmed by Jursa's discovery.

¹³⁴ Nigel Reynolds, "[Tiny tablet provides proof for Old Testament](#)" (July 11, 2007).



K. Unger (Babylonian) Prism

2 Kings 25 and Jeremiah 39-41, 43, and 52 mention Nebuzaradan as the captain of the Babylonian guard. A prism found in Babylon and published by Eckhard Unger in 1938 lists Nebuzaradan (Nebuzeriddinam) as a member of Nebuchadnezzar's court. The Hebrew term for the office he occupies is a loan word from Akkadian that literally means "cook," but in some contexts the activities of this person are the functions of a high state official, so something like "captain of the guard" is correct.



L. Gemariah Seal

Jeremiah 36:10-12, 25 mentions a governmental official named Gemariah son of Shaphan who was associated with the temple. In 1986 Yigdal Shiloh published bullae from his excavations in Jerusalem that date from the time of Jeremiah. One of them contains the inscription, "Gemariah, son of Shaphan." This is very likely the same person as in Jeremiah 36 because of the combination of names, the fact Shaphan is a relatively rare name, the fact the bulla was found near the locations mentioned in the biblical narrative, and the fact there are indications the seal owner was most likely a government official.¹³⁵



M. Azariah Seal

1 Chronicles 6:13, 9:11 and Ezra 7:1 reveal that the high priest Hilkiah (2 Ki. 22:4-14, 23:4) had a son named Azariah. In 1982, Yigal Shiloh discovered in his "excavations along the Stepped Stone Structure at the northeastern tip of the City of David"¹³⁶ a bulla bearing the inscription "Azariah son of Hilkiah."



¹³⁵ For the references to people and events mentioned in Jeremiah, see especially Lester L. Grabbe, "The Lying Pen of the Scribes? Jeremiah and History" in Yairah Amit and others, eds., *Essays on Ancient Israel in Its Near Eastern Context* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 189-204.

¹³⁶ Christopher Eames, [Stamped into History: The Seals of the Prophet Jeremiah](#) (February 19, 2023).

N. Baruch Seal

Baruch son of Neraiah is the person in Jeremiah 36 who wrote on a scroll the words Jeremiah dictated. He also is mentioned in Jeremiah 32, 43, and 45.

In the mid-1970s a hoard of over 250 bullae surfaced in the antiquities market in Jerusalem. It is thought that these bullae were taken by unauthorized diggers from a house in Jerusalem that had been burned during the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 587/586 B.C. In 1978 archaeologist Nahman Avigad published a "Burnt House" bulla bearing the inscription, "Berekhayahu [Baruch] son of Neriyahu [Neria] the scribe." The suffix on both names, *yahu*, is a shortened form of Yahweh, and their names in Scripture are shortened forms of those full names.¹³⁷



A bulla of Baruch ben Neriah.
The fingerprint (not noticeable in the photograph)
is located in the highlighted area.

O. Jerahmeel Seal

Jeremiah 36:26 mentions Jerahmeel the son of the king as one of the officials sent by king Jehoiakim to arrest Jeremiah and Baruch. It is not certain whether the title "son of the king" is literal or simply the title of an office. One of the "Burnt House" bullae published by Avigad has an inscription, "Jerahmeel, son of the king."

¹³⁷ Despite the fact the names on the seal are in a different form from the names in Scripture, some still suspect this might be a clever forgery, but it is widely accepted as authentic.



P. Elishama Seal

Jeremiah 36:12 mentions Elishama the secretary as one of the king's officials who heard the reading of Jeremiah's prophecy. One of the "Burnt House" bullae published by Avigad has an inscription, "Elishama, servant of the king."



VIII. Babylonian Captivity (587 – 539 B.C.)

A. Babylonian Administrative Tablets

2 Kings 24:8-17, 25:27-30 and Jer. 24:1, 37:1 reveal that the Judean king Jehoiachin was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar. He remained in prison in Babylon until Nebuchadnezzar's death in 562 B.C. Not long thereafter, Evil-merodach, the new king of Babylon, released him from prison, allowed him to dine at the king's table, and provided him a living allowance (2 Ki. 25:27-30).

In 1939 Ernest Weidner published four Babylonian administrative tablets found near the Ishtar Gate in Babylon that date between 595-570 B.C. These texts include the food rations given to various foreign captives. One of the texts dated to 592 B.C. records the relatively large quantity of rations given to "Jehoiachin king of Judah" and his five sons.



B. Nabonidus Cylinder and Chronicle

Daniel 5 indicates that Belshazzar was the last Babylonian king. Since other sources said nothing about Belshazzar and presented Nabonidus as the last king, critics claimed this was a mistake in the Bible.

In 1854 a tiny, inscribed clay cylinder (actually four copies) was found by J. E. Taylor at Ur (Tell Muqqayyar in modern Iraq) which named Belshazzar as the eldest son of Nabonidus. The tablet of the Babylonian Chronicle (see above) describing events of Nabonidus's rule (555-539 B.C.) shows that Nabonidus entrusted the "army and the kingship" to Belshazzar during his lengthy absence (over ten years) at faraway Tema in northern Arabia. So Belshazzar was the *de facto* king. Daniel 5:7, 16, 29 contains a clue regarding Belshazzar's status in that he promises to elevate whoever can decipher the writing on the wall to the *third* position in the kingdom.

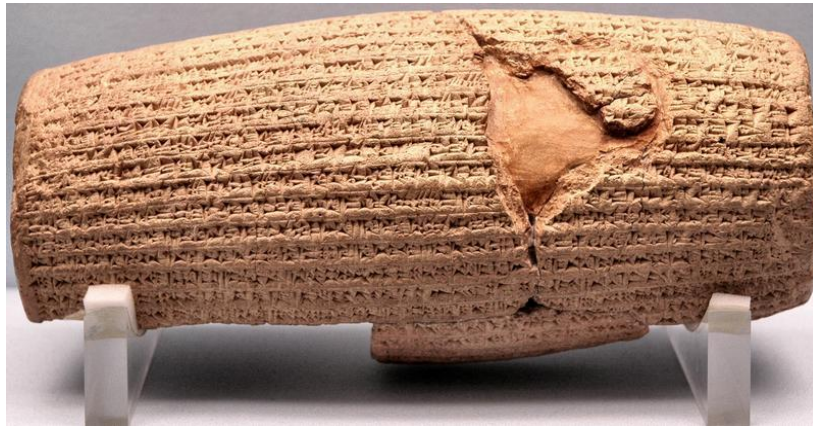


IX. Return from Exile (539 – 430 B.C.)

A. Cyrus Cylinder

Ezra 1:1-4 and 2 Chron. 36:22-23 say that Cyrus allowed the Jews to return from exile after he conquered the Babylonians. This was considered false by critics because they doubted any sixth-century B.C. ruler would do such a thing.

In 1879 Hormuzd Rassam, an Iranian archaeologist working under the British Museum, discovered in Nineveh a clay cylinder that was inscribed at the direction of Cyrus. It is about ten inches long and five inches wide and is written in the Akkadian language. Cyrus does not specifically mention Judah, but he there reports how he returned cult images (idols) to their former sanctuaries, established permanent sanctuaries for them, and returned the former inhabitants to the lands of the various gods. Cyrus credits his god Marduk with selecting him and giving him the task of ruling the world, but he is, of course, God's instrument even though he does not know God (Isa. 44:28 – 45:6).¹³⁸



B. Nehemiah's Wall

In 2007 Israeli archaeologist Eilat Mazar announced that her excavations just south of the Temple Mount had uncovered a small section of a wall the construction of which she dated to the time of Nehemiah. Some archaeologists concur with her dating,

¹³⁸ The use of Yahweh, God of heaven, and God of Israel in the decree in Ezra 1:1-3 is explainable if the decree was in response to a petition by the Jews. It was Persian policy at that time to use the title of the god or gods recognized by the local population. See, e.g., H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 11-12. Using this terminology does not mean Cyrus was a convert.

but others think the wall may have been constructed more recently. The photograph below indicates the wall in question with an oval.



C. Elephantine Papyri

The Book of Nehemiah mentions repeatedly an opponent named Sanballat the Horonite. He was governor of Samaria at the time. It also mentions that Eliashib was the high priest (Neh. 3:1, 20; 13:4) and that one of his sons was named Johanan (Neh. 12:22-23), the longer form of which is Jehohanan, as indicated in Ezra 10:6.

In the early 20th century, a trove of papyri written in Aramaic was discovered at an unusual Jewish settlement at Elephantine in southern Egypt. Papyrus 30, which dates to 407 B.C., is a letter from priests at Elephantine to Bagohi, the then governor of Judah, for permission to rebuild their temple of Yahweh that had been destroyed by Egyptian troops. They state in the letter that they "sent a letter [to] our lord, and to *Jehohanan the high priest* and his colleagues the priests who are in Jerusalem, and to Ostanes brother of Anani and the nobles of the Jews." Jehohanan is no doubt the son of Eliashib, the high priest mentioned in Nehemiah, who had since become the high priest. The priests also refer to a letter they previously sent "to Delaiah and Shelemiah, sons of *Sanballat, governor of Samaria*." These are the sons the Sanballat who opposed Nehemiah.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ See, Christopher Eames and Warren Reinsch, "[Elephantine Papyrus: Proving the book of Nehemiah](#)" and Kennedy (2020), 168-169.



X. Herod the Great (72 – 4 B.C.)

A. Herod Inscriptions

Herod the Great ruled Judea at the time of Jesus' birth. He is the one who summoned the wise men or magi after Christ's birth and the one who slaughtered the male children of Bethlehem when he realized he had been tricked by the wise men (Matthew 2).

In 1970 Ya'akov Meshorer published a limestone weight probably from Jerusalem bearing the Greek inscription "Year 32 of king Herod, pious and friend of Caesar, inspector of markets, three minas."



In 1988 Ersie Mantzoulinou-Richards published a Greek inscription found in three fragments, the first of which was found around 1874. The inscription is from a

building, probably in Delos (though found in Syros), that Herod dedicated to the people. It states: "King Herod to the people of . . ."



In 1995 Alla Kushnir-Stein published a lead weight from Ashdod bearing the Greek inscription "In the time of king Herod, pious and friend of Caesar."



Several inscriptions from the people of Athens to Herod have been found. They describe him as "friend of Romans" and "the pious king and friend of the Emperor."

B. Herod Ostraca

Yigdael Yadin's excavations of Masada in 1963-1965 uncovered some thirteen broken wine jugs that had been imported from Italy. These ostraca dated to 19 B.C. and have written on them in Latin "for Herod, king of the Jews."



C. Coins of Herod the Great

In his authoritative book *Guide to Biblical Coins*, David Hendin lists twenty-two different types of coins that were issued by king Herod the Great that bore his name in Greek, either as "of king Herod" or simply "king Herod."¹⁴⁰ Four were from the mint in Samaria; the remainder were from the mint in Jerusalem. Here is an example from the mint in Samaria:



D. Herod's Tomb

Josephus reported that Herod was buried at Herodium, an extravagant fortress and palace complex three miles southeast of Bethlehem. Herodium was first excavated by Virgilio Corbo from 1962-1967, but it was not until 2007 that Ehud Netzer discovered the long-sought tomb. In 2013 archaeologists Joseph Patrich and Benjamin Arubas challenged the claim that the mausoleum found by Netzer was Herod's burial place, arguing it was too modest for such an egomaniac, but Netzer's conclusion is still generally accepted as correct. Here is a picture of the excavation (left) and a replica of

¹⁴⁰ David Hendin, *Guide to Biblical Coins*, 5th ed. (Nyack, NY: Amphora, 2010), 237-242.

what the mausoleum is thought to have looked like (right) followed by a diagram of its location at Herodium.



XI. Jesus (4 B.C. – A.D. 30)

A. Jesus' Boyhood Home (?)

In the late seventh century A.D., an Irish monk named Adomnán produced a three-volume work titled *De Locis Sanctis*, which is Latin for "about holy places." It was based on information from a monk named Arculf who had traveled to the Holy Land, but Adomnán makes clear that he has questioned Arculf closely and checked what he told him against other available sources. In that work, Adomnán reports that there were two large churches in the center of Nazareth, one of which is identifiable as the present-day Church of the Annunciation. The other church, which he calls the Church of the Nutrition, meaning the "church of the upbringing of Christ," was near the Church of the Annunciation and was built over vaults that contained a spring and the remains of two tombs. Between those tombs, and thus under the church, was the house in which Jesus was raised.

The Sisters of Nazareth Convent is maybe 100 yards from the Church of the Annunciation. Some limited and amateur excavation was done at the Sisters of Nazareth Convent in the later 19th century by the nuns and their workmen, and again in 1936 by a priest, but the first serious professional excavation began with the Nazareth Archaeological Project in 2006 headed by the Cambridge-trained archaeologist Ken Dark. He reported in an article in 2015 in *Biblical Archaeology Review* that his excavation of the cellar of the convent revealed precisely what had been described in *De Locis Sanctis*. That is, there was evidence of a large Byzantine church that had been built over a chamber that housed two tombs and a spring. Between the two tombs was a first-century Jewish home, which was cut into the limestone hillside and completed with stone-built walls. Both the Byzantine church and a subsequent Crusader church were constructed with clear regard for the home. Dark states, "The excellent preservation of

this rectilinear structure or house can be explained by its later history. Great efforts had been made to encompass the remains of this building within the vaulted cellars of both the Byzantine and Crusader churches, so that it was thereafter protected."

Here is the rock-cut doorway of this first-century home. Dark states, "In front of the doorway, a fragment of the original floor survives."



He concludes his article this way:

At the Sisters of Nazareth Convent there was evidence of a large Byzantine church with a spring and two tombs in its crypt. The first-century house described at the beginning of this article, probably a courtyard house, stands between the two tombs. Both the tombs and the house were decorated with mosaics in the Byzantine period, suggesting that they were of special importance, and possibly venerated. Only here have we evidence for all the characteristics that *De Locus* [sic] *Sanctis* ascribes to the Church of the Nutrition, including the house.

Was this the house where Jesus grew up? It is impossible to say on archaeological grounds. On the other hand, there is no good archaeological reason why such an identification should be discounted. What we can say is that this building was probably where the Byzantine church builders believed Jesus had spent his childhood in Nazareth.

B. Coins of Herod Archelaus

Herod the Great died in 4 B.C. In his final will, he expressed his intention that Archelaus, who was his oldest surviving son, be given the title "king" and put in charge of the territories of Samaria, Judea, and Idumea. Archelaus's younger brother, Antipas, was to be "tetrarch" (a lesser title) of Galilee and Perea, and Philip II, Herod's son by another woman, was named "tetrarch" of Iturea and Trachonitis. Augustus confirmed

Herod's proposed threefold division of his kingdom but refused to grant Archelaus the title "king." He made him "ethnarch" of the territory with the prospect of becoming king if he proved himself in that role.¹⁴¹ He did not do so and was removed from power in A.D. 6. His "territories were annexed to the province of Syria and placed under direct rule of the prefect Coponius."¹⁴²

Matthew 2:19-20 reports that after Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream in Egypt and told him to return to Israel. He did that, and then verse 22 states: "But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there." Archelaus probably is alluded to in the parable of the minas in Lk. 19:11-27.

Hendin lists six types of coins that were issued by the Herod Archelaus. They are inscribed in Greek with the name Herod and various indications of the title "ethnarch."¹⁴³ Here is an example:



C. Coins of Herod Antipas

Herod Antipas ruled Galilee and Perea until his death in A.D. 39. Luke 23:6-12 reports that Herod, meaning Herod Antipas, ridiculed and mocked Jesus before sending him back to Pilate. He earlier had imprisoned John the Baptist and beheaded him at the request of Herodias's daughter (Mat. 14:1-12; Mk. 6:14-29; Lk. 9:7-9). He is referred to more technically as "Herod the tetrarch" in Mat. 14:1; Lk. 3:19, 9:7; and Acts 13:1 and as "Herod tetrarch of Galilee" in Lk. 3:1.

Hendin lists twenty-one types of coins that were issued by Herod Antipas. They are typically inscribed in Greek with "of Herod the Tetrarch."¹⁴⁴ Here is an example:

¹⁴¹ George Athas, *Bridging the Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2023), 594, 602-607.

¹⁴² Hendin (2010), 243.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 244-245.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 250-255.



D. Coins of Herod Philip II

Herod Philip II ruled as tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis until A.D. 34. Luke 3:1-2 reports that he held that office when the word of God came to John the Baptist in the wilderness. Philip married Herodias's daughter Salome, whose dance led to John's beheading.

Hendin lists seventeen types of coins that were issued by Herod Philip, all but four of which are inscribed in Greek with "Philip the Tetrarch" or "Philip."¹⁴⁵ Here is an example:



E. Capernaum Synagogue

Jesus is mentioned as teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum in Mk. 1:21, Lk. 4:31-35, and Jn. 6:59. A large limestone synagogue was discovered in Capernaum that was thought to belong to the first century, but in the early 1970s it was determined that this structure dates from the fourth and fifth centuries.

In 1975 excavators discovered black basalt walls under all four corners of the limestone synagogue. Further work revealed that these walls are four feet thick, much too thick for a private dwelling, and associated pottery demonstrates that the basalt structure was built in the first century. Recall from Lk. 7:1-5 that a centurion was praised for

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 255-262.

having built the synagogue in Capernaum. The underlying structure is the same size as the limestone synagogue and is laid out like that synagogue. These reasons and the tendency to build religious sites on existing ones have convinced many that the basalt structure is a first century synagogue on which the later synagogue was built. Archaeologist John McRay, for example, says it "is certainly the remains of the synagogue in which Jesus preached."¹⁴⁶ Others are not yet convinced it is a synagogue.



F. Peter's House

Matthew 8:14-15, Mk. 1:29-31, and Lk. 4:38-39 report that Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law while staying in Peter's house in Capernaum. That evening he healed the sick and demon-possessed who gathered at the door. This presumably is where he also healed the paralytic lowered through the roof as reported in Mk. 2:1-12.

In 1968 Virgilio Corbo and Stanislao Loffreda began investigating a fifth-century octagonal church building located 84 feet south of the synagogue in Capernaum. During the Byzantine era, which includes the fifth century, octagonal churches were built over sacred sites in the Holy Land. Beneath this octagonal church was a fourth-century church, and beneath that church was a house dating to the mid-first century.

The walls of the house were narrow and would not support a masonry roof, meaning the roof would have been made of wooden branches covered with earth, like the one in Mk. 2:4. The walls, ceiling, and floor of the central room of the house had been plastered in the first century, as was done with public rooms that were used for special purposes. It is the only house known in Capernaum to have plastered walls, and the walls and floors had been replastered at least twice.

In the mid-first century there was a change in the pottery that was used in that room indicating a change from normal residential living. More than 150 inscriptions were

¹⁴⁶ John McRay, *Archaeology and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 163-164.

scratched on the plaster walls in Greek, Syriac, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Latin beginning in the second century and perhaps even earlier. These include appeals to Christ for help, possible references to Peter, and various Christian symbols like crosses. Sometime after the first century the roof of the central room was raised, and the fifth-century octagonal chapel was centered on this room.

This is the only house in this area of Galilee that has been identified by archaeologists, pilgrims, and ancient tradition as Peter's house. Kennedy states: "The house has an extremely early tradition as being the house of Peter, documented in the 4th century AD during the pilgrimage of Egeria, who wrote that 'in Capernaum, what is more, the house of the prince of the Apostles [Peter] has been turned into a church, leaving its original walls however quite unchanged.'"¹⁴⁷

Many scholars are persuaded by this evidence that this is indeed the house of Peter. James H. Charlesworth, for example, states:

Archaeological evidence is almost always hotly debated. What, then, is clear? The "house church" in Capernaum that is celebrated as Peter's house may well be the house in which Jesus taught. It is certainly not a "synagogue," but it seems to be Peter's house. Thus, I fully agree with J. Murphy-O'Connor, who is unusually well informed of data relating to Jesus and archaeology and astutely critical; notice his judgment: "The most reasonable assumption is the one attested by the Byzantine pilgrims, namely, that it was the house of Peter in which Jesus may have lodged (Mt 5:20 [sic]). Certainly, nothing in the excavations contradicts this identification."¹⁴⁸



¹⁴⁷ Kennedy (2023), 296.

¹⁴⁸ James H. Charlesworth, ed., *Jesus and Archaeology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 50.

G. Jacob's Well

John 4:5-6 says that when Jesus was on his way to Galilee he came to Jacob's well at Sychar in Samaria near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Genesis 33:18-19 and Josh. 24:32 locate this field at Shechem. John 4:20 indicates they were at the foot of Mount Gerizim. There is no reference to a well being dug by or for Jacob in the Bible, but it no doubt was named Jacob's well because of its proximity to Jacob's field in Shechem. This is, of course, where Jesus conversed with the Samaritan woman.

A well located at the base of Mount Gerizim less than one-half mile southeast of ancient Shechem (Tell Balata, just east of modern Nablus) and about one-half mile south of the village of Askar, thought to be ancient Sychar, is accepted by Jews, Samaritans, Christians, and Muslims as Jacob's well. It is now located in a Greek Orthodox Church which has been under construction since the early twentieth century. This well was mentioned in A.D. 333 by the Pilgrim of Bordeaux and in the mid-fourth century by Eusebius. Jerome indicated in A.D. 380 that a church had been built on the site. That church was destroyed in the seventh century and replaced by another church in the twelfth century. The Greek Orthodox Church bought the well and the surrounding property in 1885.

In 1881 C. W. Barclay published dimensions of the well. The opening was 17.5 inches, the width of the well shaft was 7 feet six inches, and the depth of the well was 67 feet. The depth apparently has fluctuated as a man named Claude Conder found the depth in 1875 to be 75 feet.



H. Pool of Bethesda

John 5:2 mentions a pool in Jerusalem located near the Sheep Gate that in Aramaic is called Bethesda. John notes that it has five roofed colonnades.

The Sheep Gate is known to be located north of the Temple Mount. The Copper Scroll from Qumran, which dates prior to A.D. 70, refers to Beth Eshdathayin, which means "House of the Twin Pools." Eusebius also identifies the Pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem as having twin pools, as does the Pilgrim of Bordeaux, and alludes to it being in proximity to the Temple area. This fits with five roofed colonnades in that there was one on each of the four sides around the perimeter of the two pools and one running between the two pools.

Shortly after the turn of the twentieth century, two large pools were found north of the north wall of the Temple Mount. They had been cut into rock and plastered. Many fragments of column bases, capitals, and drums were found which, in John McRay's words, "probably belonged to the five porches (i.e. porticoes or colonnaded walkways) of the pool John mentions."¹⁴⁹



I. Pool of Siloam

In Jn. 9:1-7 Jesus heals a blind man by having him go and wash in the pool of Siloam. The healed man also mentions the pool by name in 9:11 when recounting his healing to others (see also Neh. 3:15).

Following the excavations by Frederick Jones Bliss and Archibald Campbell Dickie in the late 19th century, it was thought that the Pool of Siloam was the pool that had later become known as the Pool of Silwan, the outlet of the Siloam Tunnel. A church was constructed on the site in the fifth century. Here is what the traditional site looks like today.

¹⁴⁹ McRay, 187.



In 2004 a large pool was discovered by archaeologist Eli Shukrun near the south side of the traditional pool of Siloam. It is about 165 feet long, is lined with stone, and has steps leading into it from all sides. There is an elaborately paved assembly area adjacent to the pool. Here is an image of that site.



Most people accepted that this was the actual location of the Pool of Siloam, but doubts have arisen about that identification. Most notably, Nahshon Szanton of Tel Aviv University published an article in 2023 arguing that the original site proposed by Bliss and Dickie is correct and that the pool found by Shukrun in 2004 was what is known as Solomon's Pool.¹⁵⁰ In any event, John's information is corroborated.

¹⁵⁰ Nahshon Szanton, "[Ritual Purification and Bathing: The Location and Function of Siloam Pool and Solomon's Pool in Second Temple Period Jerusalem](#)," *'Antiqot* 113 (2023).

J. Pilate Stone Inscription

All four Gospels record that Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea who handed Jesus over to be crucified. His role in that event is noted in several places in Acts and by Paul in 1 Tim. 6:13.

In 1961 Antonio Frova discovered in Caesarea Maritima an inscription in Latin mentioning Pontius Pilate. The left-hand side of the inscription was chipped away, presumably to make the stone fit better in its secondary usage, but restoration of the second and third lines is clear: "Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judea." The entire inscription may have read, "To the people of Caesarea Pontius Pilate, prefect of Judea, has given the Tiberieum" (perhaps a temple dedicated to the Emperor Tiberius).



Though Hendin lists six types of coins that were issued by Pontius Pilate,¹⁵¹ "the coins of Pontius Pilate, just like the coins of other Roman governors of Judea, never once mention their names. Instead, the only names used were those of emperors (or family members) at whose pleasure the prefects and procurators served."¹⁵² For that reason, I will not include coins of the Roman procurators Antonius Felix and Porcius Festus.

K. Tomb of Annas

Annas is mentioned in Lk. 3:2, Jn. 18:13, 24, and Acts 4:6. He was high priest from A.D. 6-15. Annas is called high priest after the time of his officially serving in that capacity presumably in a way similar to our continuing to refer to former presidents as

¹⁵¹ Hendin (2010), 327-328.

¹⁵² Ibid., 312.

president. He no doubt continued to wield power and influence, as indicated by the fact his son-in-law Caiaphas served as high priest (A.D. 18-36/37) as did five of his sons.

In 1994 archaeologists Leen and Kathleen Ritmeyer made a strong case that the first-century burial tombs just south of the Temple Mount near the juncture of the Hinnom and Kidron valleys, in the area popularly known as Akeldama, include the tomb of Annas the high priest. Rather than being a poor person's burial ground, this is an area of elegant and elegantly decorated burial tombs.

There are no identifying inscriptions, but three lines of evidence link the tomb with Annas. As summarized by the Ritmeyers, "The tombs of Akeldama are too elaborate to have been anything but burial places for Jerusalem's prominent citizens; their decoration echoes that of the Temple Mount, where the priests served; and Josephus places the tomb of Annas in the area of Akeldama."¹⁵³



L. Caiaphas Ossuary

Caiaphas served as high priest from A.D. 18-36/37. He was involved in the plot to arrest and kill Jesus (Mat. 26:3-4; see also, Jn. 11:49), and Jesus was brought before him to stand trial (Mat. 26:57; John 18).

In 1990 an ornate ossuary (burial bone box) was discovered in Peace Forest south of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem by workers who were building a water park. It dates to the first century and has two inscriptions, one in Aramaic and one in Hebrew, which may be translated "Caiaphas" and "Joseph, son of Caiaphas." Josephus gives Caiaphas's full

¹⁵³ Leen and Kathleen Ritmeyer, "Akeldama: Potter's Field or High Priest's Tomb?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 20 (Nov-Dec 1994), 34. Perhaps Akeldama initially referred to a small field for burying foreigners (Mat. 27:7) but came to be applied to a larger area that included the region of fine tombs.

name as "Joseph, who is called Caiaphas of the high priesthood." Inside the ossuary were the bones of six people, including one 60-year-old man, which was about Caiaphas's age when he died.

Many scholars are convinced this is indeed the ossuary of Caiaphas the high priest. Jonathan Reed and John Dominic Crossan declare, "There should be no doubt that the chamber was the resting place of the family of the high priest Caiaphas named in the gospels for his role in the crucifixion, and it's very likely that the elderly man's bones were those of Caiaphas himself."¹⁵⁴ Others, however, are not convinced that "Caiaphas" is the correct translation of the inscriptions.¹⁵⁵



M. Alexander Ossuary

Mark 15:21 reveals that Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was compelled to carry Jesus' cross. He probably mentions Alexander and Rufus because they were known to his audience.

In 1941 Eleazar Sukenik and Nahman Avigad found a first-century ossuary in the Kidron Valley. Its lid had the name "Alexander" inscribed in Greek and "Alexander" inscribed in Hebrew, but the Hebrew name was followed by a word that probably is an adjective form of Cyrene, i.e., Cyrenite. "Alexander (son) of Simon" also was written in Greek in a green chalky substance on the front and scratched on the back (after an initial incorrect start). Another ossuary in the tomb is inscribed "Sara (daughter) of Simon of Ptolemais," probably referring to Ptolemais in Cyrenica. Jack Finegan states:

¹⁵⁴ John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed, *Excavating Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001), 241.

¹⁵⁵ See the summary of objections in Craig A. Evans, *Jesus and the Ossuaries* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2003), 107-108.

Thus we have here a family burial at least to the extent of two children of a certain Simon, and their place of origin was probably Cyrene. From Ac 6:9 we know that there was a synagogue of Cyrenians in Jerusalem, and in Mk 15:21 it was Simon of Cyrene . . . the father of Alexander and Rufus, who was compelled to carry the cross of Jesus. It is surely a real possibility that this unostentatious tomb was the last resting place of the bones of at least two members of the family of this very Simon.¹⁵⁶



N. Christ's Tomb

Matthew, Mark, and John all record that Jesus was crucified at a place known in Aramaic as Golgotha, which means "Place of a Skull" (Mat. 27:33; Mk. 15:22; Jn. 19:17). Luke simply states that he was crucified at the place called "The Skull" (Lk. 23:33). John 19:41 says there was a garden at the place where Jesus was crucified and that in the garden was a new tomb, and Jn. 19:42 says the tomb was near where Jesus was crucified. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all state the tomb was cut out of rock, and Matthew and Mark specify that the entrance to the tomb was covered by a rolling rock (Mat. 27:59-60; Mk. 15:46; Lk. 23:53; Jn. 19:40-42). Hebrews 13:12 states and Jn. 19:17, 41 imply that this site was outside the walls of Jerusalem.

There is broad ancient and modern agreement that the tomb of Christ is located at the site of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher (or Sepulchre). The so-called Garden Tomb that was championed by Charles Gordon in the nineteenth century has had its advocates, but archaeological evidence has refuted that claim. The Church of the Holy Sepulcher is

¹⁵⁶ Jack Finegan, *The Archaeology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 362.

outside of the city walls as they existed at the time of Christ and is built over rock tombs that date to the first century.

After Emperor Hadrian crushed the Jewish revolt under Simon Bar Kokhba in A.D. 135, he banned Jews from Jerusalem, renamed the city Aelia Capitolina, and set out to make it a pagan city. This included erecting a temple of Jupiter and a shrine to Venus (Aphrodite) at the site that would later become the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Eusebius, writing two centuries later, implies that Golgotha was inaccessible.

We know from Eusebius, a contemporary of the events, that after the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325 Emperor Constantine decided to construct a church on the site of Christ's resurrection. The fact he ordered the pagan temple torn down and a church erected in its place shows that Christians were confident the tomb was under that temple. Eusebius reports joyfully that the excavations at that time revealed the holy tomb. In A.D. 1009 Constantine's church was destroyed by the Egyptian Caliph Hakim, and in 1048 a new church was built over the tomb. There were further destructions, repairs, and construction, and in 1959 the church underwent a major repair program.



XII. Early Church (A.D. 30 – 100)

A. King Aretas IV of Nabatea

We see in Acts 9:23-25 that after many days of being unable to counter Paul's arguments that Jesus was the Christ, the Jewish leaders in Damascus plotted to kill him. Paul learned of their plan, and though they were watching for him at the city gates 24/7, he escaped their plot by being lowered in a basket at night through an opening in the city wall. This was in the mid-30s A.D. Paul refers to this incident in 2 Cor. 11:32-33: "At

Damascus, the governor under king Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me,³³ but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands."

A burial inscription of a Nabatean governor named Itaybel dating to A.D. 37 was found in Madaba, Jordan, south of Damascus. It mentions king Aretas IV.¹⁵⁷



B. Coins of Herod Agrippa I

Herod Agrippa was the grandson of Herod the Great. He was educated in Rome, where he became friends with Gaius (Caligula) and Claudius, both of whom became emperors of Rome. Paul Barnett states: "Caligula appointed Agrippa king of Gaulanitis in 37 and of Galilee in 39. At the time of Caligula's assassination, Agrippa, who was then in Rome, persuaded Claudius to accept the imperial purple. Upon his accession in 41, Claudius added Judea to Agrippa's kingdom."¹⁵⁸ Tension between Rome and Israel was high at that time, and Claudius thought his friend would be "a suitable client king over this volatile people."¹⁵⁹ Agrippa ruled only until his death in A.D. 44. He is the Herod mentioned in Acts 12. He killed James the brother of John and imprisoned Peter. He was struck by an angel of the Lord and subsequently died.

Hendin lists fifteen types of coins that were issued by Agrippa I, four of which refer to him as "King Agrippa."¹⁶⁰ Here is an example:

¹⁵⁷ Kennedy (2020), 204-205.

¹⁵⁸ Paul Barnett, *Jesus and the Rise of Early Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 241.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

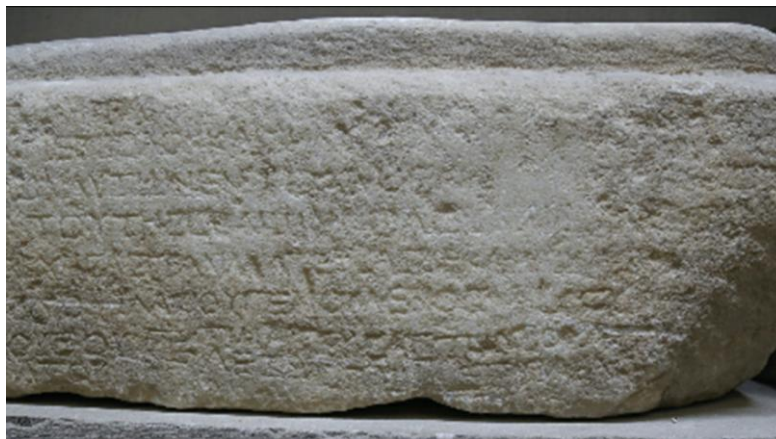
¹⁶⁰ Hendin (2010), 267-272.



C. Soloi Inscription (Proconsul Paulus)

Acts 13:4-12 reports that during Paul's first missionary journey around A.D. 47-48, he and Barnabas preached to the Roman proconsul Sergius Paulus on the island of Cyprus. In 1877 a Greek inscription was discovered on a monument that was erected in Soloi on the northern coast of Cyprus in A.D. 54 in honor of the father of a man named Apollonius. It states in pertinent part: "He also altered the senate by means of assessors *during the time of proconsul Paulus.*" Bryan Windle states:

Note that, while the inscription dates to 54 AD, it references an event *earlier* than this, during the time of the proconsul Paulus. This inscription establishes that someone in the Pauli family was proconsul on the island of Cyprus around the time the Bible describes Sergius Paulus in such a role. D. G. Hogarth personally inspected the inscription in 1888 and wrote, "The great interest of this inscription lies in the possible allusion to the Sergius Paulus of Acts xiii. There can be no good reason for doubting an identification, which would unquestionably have been proposed and hardly disputed had Sergius Paulus been known from any other source than the New Testament."¹⁶¹



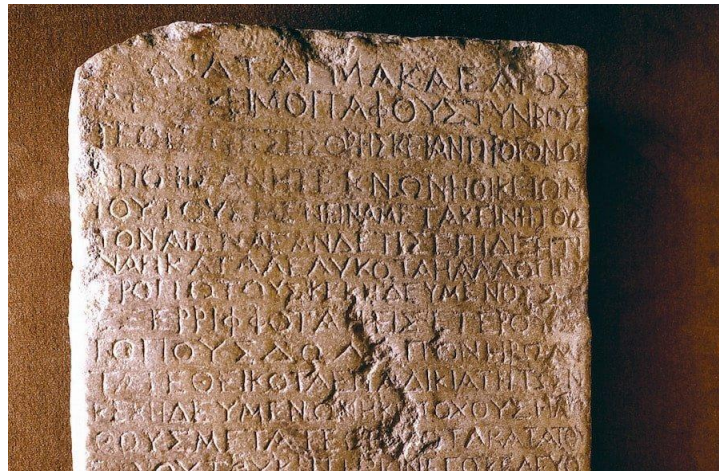
¹⁶¹ Bryan Windle, [Sergius Paulus: An Archaeological Biography](#) (November 15, 2019).

D. Nazareth Inscription

In 1878, a French antiquities collector purchased from someone in Nazareth a white marble tablet (about 24" x 15" x 2 1/2") that is inscribed in Greek and titled "Edict of Caesar." Its place of discovery is unknown, but it has been confirmed as an authentic ancient inscription. The find was not published until 1930, after the tablet was acquired by the Paris National Library. Kennedy says of the inscription:

The text specifically prohibits the moving or stealing of bodies from stone-sealed tombs with "wicked intent," compares it to an offense against the gods, and imposes an extreme new penalty of death for the crime. It states that if anyone has "extracted those who have been buried, or has moved with wicked intent those who have been buried to other places . . . or has moved sepulcher-sealing stones . . . You are absolutely not to allow anyone to move those who have been entombed . . ." Consequently, the edict describes the same type of tomb, a stone-carved tomb sealed with a large stone, which Jesus was buried in according to Judean custom, while Romans were typically cremated.¹⁶²

The text is a shortened version of a rescript letter. As Clyde Billington explains: "When an ancient Roman official would write a letter about some problem to the Roman Emperor, he would respond by sending back a rescript letter to this official on how to deal with this problem and in the process often make a law to solve the problem."¹⁶³ The French scholar who published the find originally (M. Franz Cumont) dated it based on the style of inscription to between 50 B.C. and 50 A.D., and then he and another scholar (Professor F. de Zulueta) narrowed that to the reign of Caesar Augustus (31 B.C. to 14 A.D.).



Billington makes a good case for dating it to the reign of Emperor Claudius (41-54 A.D.). He states:

¹⁶² Kennedy (2020), 200-201.

¹⁶³ Bryan Windle, [Scholar's Chair Interview: Dr. Clyde Billington](#) (March 19, 2021).

The Jewish historian Josephus, (AJ, XIX, 5) provides another rescript letter in Greek by the Emperor Claudius dealing with Jewish rights. The form, vocabulary, and syntax of this rescript of the Emperor Claudius are nearly a perfect match with the Nazareth Inscription. In other words, it provides very strong proof that the Nazareth Inscription was written by Claudius. . . .

Historical evidence and synchronisms provide strong support for dating the Nazareth Inscription to the early reign of the Emperor Claudius (41-54 AD). The historical support for dating the Nazareth Inscription to the reign of Claudius is very compelling. For example, the heading of this document reads simply "Edict of Caesar" which clearly indicates that the title "Caesar" had come to be synonymous with the title "Emperor."

The title "Caesar" was not used in this way during the reign of Caesar Augustus, but only for later Emperors! Caesar Augustus is known to have been very careful about including the Roman Senate when he made any laws; he knew what happened to Julius Caesar. However, later emperors frequently ignored the Roman Senate. The title of the Nazareth Inscription "Edict of Caesar" strongly argues against Caesar Augustus being its author.¹⁶⁴

Billington states in a 2021 interview:

Claudius's imposition of the death penalty for this crime clearly indicates that he was very concerned about something other than just tomb-robbing and/or tomb desecration. True tomb-robbing and tomb desecration in later Roman law were civil, and not criminal offenses. The Nazareth Inscription does not mention robbing or desecrating tombs but only the moving [of] bodies from tombs to other locations.

The Nazareth Inscription only fits a Jewish context, since only the Jews buried their dead in rolling-stone tombs from which bodies could be easily taken. It should be noted that the Nazareth Inscription mentions moving "sepulcher-sealing stones," in other words moving rolling stones placed over family tomb entrances.¹⁶⁵

Kennedy says, "By the time of Claudius, knowledge of Christianity and the story of the resurrection of Jesus had spread throughout many areas of the Roman Empire, beginning to cause problems in the realms of religion, politics, and society, and Claudius seems to have attempted to prevent any future claims of the resurrection of the dead."¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. See also, Clyde Billington, "[The Nazareth Inscription: Proof of the Resurrection of Christ?](#)" (from Spring 2020 issue of *Artifax*).

¹⁶⁵ Bryan Windle, [Scholar's Chair Interview: Dr. Clyde Billington](#) (March 19, 2021).

¹⁶⁶ Kennedy (2020), 201.

E. Gentile Temple Warning

In Acts 21:27-31 Paul is accused of bringing a Greek into the temple and defiling that holy place. That was such a serious offense that the people were seeking to kill him.

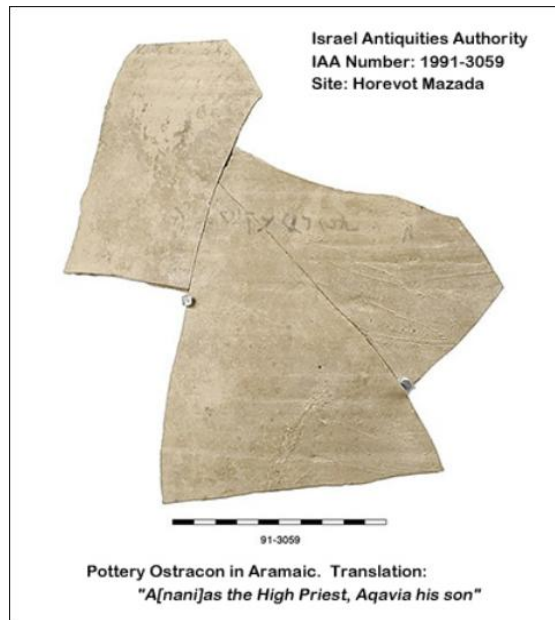
In 1871 Charles Clermont-Ganneau found in Jerusalem a limestone block (about 33 inches long, 22 inches high, and 14 inches thick) on which was inscribed in Greek a warning to Gentiles to stay out of the perimeter surrounding the temple. It states: "Let no Gentile [lit. other race] enter within the partition and barrier surrounding the temple; whosoever is caught shall be responsible for his subsequent death." A fragment of a second inscription was found in 1935 outside the wall around Jerusalem's Old City. The inscribed letters originally were painted red. The partial inscription closely matches the wording and layout of the full inscription.



F. Ananias Ostrakon

Ananias served as high priest from A.D. 47-59. In Acts 23:2-3 he commanded that Paul be struck on the mouth, and in Acts 24:1 he went to Caesarea with Tertullus to make the case against Paul to the governor.

In 1989 a partially restored ostrakon from Masada was published by Yigael Yadin, Joseph Naveh, and Ya'akov Meshorer. It reads, "A[nani]as the high priest and Aqaviah his son."



G. Coins of Herod Agrippa II

In A.D. 55, Herod Agrippa II, the great-grandson of Herod the Great, was given by Rome "an extended version of Philip's old tetrarchy while exercising certain religious prerogatives in Jerusalem."¹⁶⁷ He is the official who heard Paul's case in Acts 26, the one who said in Acts 26:28, "In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?"

Agrippa II issued an extensive series of coins during his four decades of rule. Here is an example with a Greek inscription that includes the name "King Agrippa."



H. Erastus Inscription

Romans 16:23 has a greeting from Erastus, who in the later letter of 2 Timothy (4:20) is said to have stayed in Corinth. Paul describes him as the "treasurer" of the city.

¹⁶⁷ David C. Braund, "Herodian Dynasty" in David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:174.

In 1929 a paving stone was found near a theater in Corinth. It was published by John Kent in 1966 and bears the following inscription in Latin: "Erastus, who in return for his aedileship, laid [the pavement] at his own expense." An "aedile" is a commissioner of public works, which is why NIV translates "treasurer" in Rom. 16:23 as "director of public works." The Greek term rendered "treasurer" may be broad enough to refer to the Latin office "aedile," or Erastus may have moved up to that position after Romans was written.



I. Gallio Inscription

Acts 18:12 reveals that Paul was brought before the tribunal or judgment seat in Corinth "when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia." Gallio was the brother of the famous Roman philosopher Seneca.

In 1905 four fragments of an inscription were found and published by French archaeologist Emile Bourguet. He found three additional fragments in 1910, which were published in 1913 by A. Brassac, but these were ignored until 1967 when Andre Plassart added two additional fragments and demonstrated that they all belonged to the same inscription. Plassart officially published the nine fragments in 1970.

The inscription is a copy of a letter from Emperor Claudius to the city of Delphi naming Gallio as friend of Claudius and proconsul of Achaia that was once attached to the outer wall of a temple. Its real significance is that, when combined with other information, it permits Gallio's year of service as proconsul to be dated to either A.D. 50-51 or 51-52, the latter being more likely. This is an important chronological anchor for dating Paul's activities.



J. Judgment Seat (Bēma) at Corinth

The tribunal or judgment seat (Greek *bēma*) before which Paul was brought in Acts 18:12 refers to a speaker's platform where proclamations were read and citizens appeared before government officials. Pilate sat on the *bēma* as he judged Christ, as did Herod in Acts 12:21 and Festus in Acts 25. Paul says that we will all stand before the judgment seat of God (Rom. 14:10), which he also calls the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10).

The *bēma* at Corinth was discovered in 1935 and identified by Oscar Broneer in 1937. It was described in detail in later excavation reports, so one can know with confidence the place where Paul stood before Gallio. An inscription was found in the vicinity of the *bēma* identifying it as a *Rostra*, which is the official Latin name for this structure. Based on the style of letters in this inscription, John Kent dates the construction of the Corinthian *bēma* to A.D. 25-50.



K. Galilean Boat ("Jesus Boat")

This is not a direct connection with Scripture, but I wanted to mention it anyway. Jesus on several occasions was in a boat with his disciples on the Sea of Galilee (Mat. 8:23, 14:32-33, 16:5; Mk. 4:36, 6:51, 8:14; Lk. 8:22; Jn. 6:21). This is where he calmed the storm and met them walking on the water.

In 1986 Moshe and Yuval Lufan found in the mud of the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee a wooden boat dating to the first-century. It was 26 feet long and 8 feet wide, large enough to hold thirteen people, which makes it similar to the boats in which Jesus and the disciples would have traveled. One notable feature is how low it would have sat in the water.



L. James Ossuary

One of Jesus' brothers was named James (Mat. 13:55; Mk. 6:3; Gal. 1:19). He became a leader of the church in Jerusalem and was the author of the Letter of James. Josephus reports that he was stoned to death in Jerusalem A.D. 62 as a "breaker of the law," a charge no doubt having to do with his Christian faith.

In 2002 *Biblical Archaeology Review* published an ossuary with an inscription in Aramaic reading, "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus." Before he published the find, Hershel Shanks, the editor of the magazine, had the inscription authenticated by two leading epigraphers and the ossuary authenticated by the Geological Survey of Israel.



Nevertheless, the Israel Antiquities Authority, which had been left out of the loop regarding the find, prosecuted the ossuary's owner, Oded Golan, for forgery. After a trial that went on for seven plus years, Golan was declared "not guilty" on March 14, 2012. Hershel Shanks, the editor of *Biblical Archaeology Review*, has laid out the evidence that, in his view, leaves "no doubt" the inscription is authentic, and he has blistered the IAA for its unsubstantiated claims and groundless and political prosecution of Golan.¹⁶⁸ Indeed, it is significant when Israel's leading epigrapher, Ada Yardeni, declares, "If this is a forgery, I quit" and another leading epigrapher, André Lemaire, is equally confident of the inscription's antiquity and authenticity.

New Testament scholar Craig Evans declared in 2023, "There is no question that the James ossuary and inscription are ancient and therefore authentic."¹⁶⁹ Bryan Windle concludes his 2023 assessment of the artifact with: "In summary, I would conclude that the James Ossuary is an authentic artifact, that the complete inscription is genuine, and that it *likely* contained the bones of James, the brother of Jesus Christ from the New Testament, although we cannot be certain."¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ See Hershel Shanks, "'Brother of Jesus' Inscription Is Authentic!" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 38.4 (Jul/Aug 2012), 26-33, 62, 64 and Hershel Shanks, "First Person: 'Brother of Jesus' Inscription—Authentic or a Forgery?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 42:04 (Jul/Aug 2016): see also, Amnon Rosenfeld, "[The Antiquities Game - Behind the Trial of the Century](#)" (July 2014).

¹⁶⁹ Bryan Windle, "[Weighing the Evidence: Is the James Ossuary Authentic?](#)" (April 20, 2023).

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

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